

Fall 1997

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Valparaiso University

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The Lighter



Fall 1997

The Lighter

Valparaiso University

Volume XLIII Issue 1

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All selections remain anonymous throughout the selection process. *The Lighter* welcomes submissions from all undergraduate, graduate, and law students regardless of race, gender, or sexual orientation.

The editor assumes responsibility for the contents of this magazine. The views expressed in the works do not represent any official stance of Valparaiso University.

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Over the Town

Matthew 7:24-27

My father and I shared a view in the black-blue night
over our town, looking over the spillway whose body
he had built. He knew its flaws long before the side seared
and the river sucked and the sand below it fled,
leaving a hungry hole.

We peered down
into the mystery of things without architects,
mused in silence about human silence when suspect,
and let our thoughts gather about the pixels of light,
like fresh-opened eyes in the dark.

His life was craft
and the years a plane and his aggregate grief was cast
and then cast again, like shavings by the wayside. Oh his tender-
ness,
beyond that of my youth, as we sat there like lovers on the hill
and breathed the consolation of destruction
while the night was still. Ours

was the vision, and he silently spoke
this poem of peace, anchoring me in something
stronger than cement's sureness, blessing me
before the drive home.

...a poem...

for Jamie

...and if this world has a beginning, where
shall we place it? I would look to God if I
just knew where to face it. Shall I look to
myself, the only thing I can seem
to settle upon as having an ending? But
perhaps I am also caught in the eternal etre--
to be's a fine state, but a confusing dilemma.
But if we continue, no need to stop musing
although eternally, through none of my choosing,
truth runs like a fugitive on the escape
and life confounds as though I'm a mere ape.
Could it all be inscrutable fiction? There're no
footnotes below us to resolve this confusion,
just footprints that mark, but only for their day,
sages until time washes imprints away. And what
of time, and its days into years, the jester of joy
and interminable tears? If all is ellipsis
and ever shall be, hold me, please, sweet trinity,
and if this world has an end, well, let be,
and in the meantime, we'll make some poetry.

Fishmouth

You asked me
if I wanted to hold it like you were,
up under the gills,
 fanning
 like red bologna slices.

Its fishmouth,
a disabled hinge, gaped open like Space;
mine was clamped. It was my quiet face.
You held it in front of you like a fat tie,
and then like a measuring stick to me.
It stretched to my shoulder, this trophy
whose life you were emptying. I watched
 its slime
 roll off it
 into sad lakes on newspaper.

Could you see me with your marble eyes?

I was four and knew nothing about fishing
but the loud pucker of lake lips under the bow
where I sat like an exalted queen. Oh, how you laughed,
spraying me silly with water. The strands of pearls
shattered
 while jumping
 for my neck.

That was the game.

Now the fishmouth gaped
open like Time. It would reveal the test of my line,
invisible to the camera, messy, and tangled in a knot
(my heart always had fumbling fingers) around you.

But I wondered
 in a drop
 of space and time
 after a comma,
like the breath

Who was this man,
(dripping with tender danger)
 who could give life and take it.
with authority
like the wrist-snap
that sent his bobber like a bullet on a long puppet string
walking on the water?

You had asked me if I wanted to hold it.
"No" said a twist of my Mickey Mouse ears
(for good luck in the boat)
and before you got your knife,
our eyes fixed on the fish
(an impotent dagger
now in its death),
and someone took a picture.

Lost to Paradise

I once knew this man, a street man, named Walter.
He used to gamble; for days if he could keep a good hand.
And he would sleep only when his pockets were empty.
He could never relax when he had a fifty on hand, and
He only hurt himself, he thought. But he hurt his children too,
Jimmy and Tina, and he didn't know what to do.

There were people I had to support and I didn't know if I could do
that.

But Walter knew I could. Walter always knew I would.
We don't always know ourselves or what our purpose is.
We don't know what in the world we're supposed to do.

There was this other man I knew. I gave him ten years.
Sometimes fussing, fighting, laughing and crying.
Who could know he was taking my strength?
He gave up his life, but he put up a hell of a fight.

When I was strong again, I knew I'd never forget him;
His piercing eyes looked into mine,
Looking for the strength to die. He found it and
Turned cold in my arms. His spirit left him.

God had given me strength and courage to share;
Enough to see me through. But now I'm tired and weak.
So Walter, wherever you are, please come see about me.
I'm so weary now, and I need your strength, my angel.

Boy

Alone in a rage,
dark sycamore tree,
shakes tripping away,
from a sweet mystery.

Anatomically wrong,
as the shadows close in,
windy days by the ocean,
and sandy hot sin.

Asking who is my god,
and where are my eyes,
sweet buttery kisses,
and long slender thighs.

Alone in a rage,
in a sweet mystery,
so your eyes will come find me,
dark sycamore tree.

He

Dancing around
in the shimmering rain
while you gaze through a screen
of fluttering pain-

In your eyes I'm a smile
between fleshy tan trees
as your teeth turn to icicles
telling me He's-

A bearded imposter
upon wooden crosses
sacrilege, hypocrites,
sexual losses-

Deep school of thought
beneath fiery oppression
drunkenness poisoned
by hazy depression-

And the not-so-tall blond boy
is calling my name
as I'm dancing around
in the fluttering pain.

The Break

Twenty-eight days and still counting,
skinny and twisted and fine.
Fucked with the view that she's tripping,
and fucked by the view that she's mine.

You didn't want oil in the water.
You didn't want trash in the sand.
You didn't want liquor to poison
the clarity of your demand.

Beauty queen taking you higher,
beauty queen taking you down.
Pretty girl's eyes keep on shifting,
pretty girl burning the ground.

Keep it in style so demanding,
boy in the land overseas.
Fucked by the time of the ending,
and fucked while I sit on my knees.

Twenty-eight days and the moon dance,
snaps like a tight rubber band.
Fucked by the one in the ending,
and fucked with my face in the sand.



Blind Grace

My darkened skin called out
Their taunts. Obscenities yelled
From the half-open yellow bus
Window which carried Them
To the comfort of their televisions
and four course meals. I tripped
And my ego fell to the red dusty
Ground,

One young girl with a pristeen
White dress with pale blue hair bow
To match, the pride of a separate
Community, peered from the view
Seated near the rear of the bus,
Her face told a different story.

She called out not like the others,
The tone contradicted her face.
Her sympathy I could have done
Without, only her friendship
Could break the spell, the spell
Of another color.

She got off at the large boulder,
A landmark of land ownership.
A glance behind forced
The meeting of our two pairs of eyes,
One blue and one brown. A fight
for sisterhood forced this young girl
toward my shadow laid on the road.

This forbidden encounter -
With one touch of acceptance, history's
Boundaries were shattered.

Political Fraud

This man of the people once wore
A navy blue pinstripe during his campaign
In order to show off a dignity
Construed by his consultants.
The women, plain as a brown tabby
Cat, always detected the sip
Of Crown Royale still on his minty
Breath.

She once surfaced the slogan
That won his audience over.
Only the headlines kept him honest.
Once, she walked down Pennsylvania
Avenue, but now she cooks his Western
Omelettes and Canadian bacon.
He took her "under his wings"
Then he took her to bed.
She lay down on his pillow-
A symbol of his Obligation.

She rose from his bed, from
A spell broken by a momentary
Gain of self-esteem. Her beauty
Shone through the spite
That existed in her eyes. "Look
What you could have had."

suicide note for a relationship:

I wore your accusations
written across my forehead,
a prison sentence, a tattoo.

I dyed my hair red
to escape your verdict,

but you kept me chained
with that hair, your fingers
weaving an awkward leash,

your noose of insults
circling my throat.

tonight I met her eyes in the mirror.
we put scissors to our throats, and
together, sliced away two years of you.

I can laugh easily now,
left light of memories.

only this hair, nestled in its box,
belongs to you. here, take the weight
of my words into your hands.

you can be the poet now.
you try untangling this mess.

fragments from songbook the first

Oh I think this thing's begun. —Gordon Gano

What we have made
And what not made,
April springs forth beneath my spade.

What we have done
And what not done,
April eddies beneath the sun.

Ever breathing,
Ever breeding,
Water evades metaphysic meaning,
Turning through the unfull sea,
Bending through veins in rock
And plain, evaporating and descending,
Taking tangible shape
Confronting not proceeding from the brain.
At the first wash of morning,
The chill making nose to run,
Cheeks to redden, breaths to gasps

When what takes time
And what takes place,
Melting across surreal landscape,
Behave in waves like water,
There and then the word
Can be heard birthing, birth.

Before the desiring,
Before the uniting,
Kami says:
Everything about you

¡madre, abuela!
¡Maria y Eva!

At every hour and when communion is held
The bells do yell and swell
And lose themselves in cars passing
And rise again in time to sing and chime,
Ring and climb the sky and slide to the ground below,
One's own scarf and hair blowing in passing windows,
The uncanny feeling shaking your father's hand
That you are shaking your own.

And a curious groan of the earth

Wislo moja, wislo szara,
This our land the land of our birth
From time oblivious and
Dark writhing over veiled water,
Over this the devil's stomping ground
And limestone vomited up in mounds,
Void and formless this place
Like teeth mis-set by sour grapes

fragments from songbook the fourth

The bells are ringing
And they say all go and see.
Yes I know why they're ringing
They ring out for me.

—James Brown (Billy Ward)

Peter's bells in Rome
A more solemn tone:
Bold, separate,
Sparse, discordant,
Clear, and monotone.

perfidia

Once the meaning of her words became clear,
Her lips, still moving, produced no words to hear,
Only blasts of wind,
Snaking and pasting the mountain
In liquid black.
My throat and back
Grasped one last glance where
The sunlit peak should have been
(How should have been her hair)
Before reeling back.

d u s t y o u t o d u s t

remember that you are dust
remember that and to dust
you are dust remember that
and to and dust and you
shall return dust you to dust
shall return you shall return

Prayer for the Abiding

Swirls, in misty colored glass
that spiral as through
a corridor extending far past
the confines of eternity.

In kaleidoscopic patterns
that shift and contort
in a moment spent.
I stand, dizzy,
reeling in the chaos.

What becomes of a life
with no direction?
With an end not even recognized,
a bruised forehead slammed
into a concrete wall
hidden by the misty glass.

But, as the hour glass
rains down sand,
there are those
feelings
dreams
concerns
that stay constant,
though naught else does.
It is in those aspects of existence
that the misty glass shatters
the whirling fog lifts.

For what is
in the past, present, and future
is all that is
of any worth in this world.

I love not but today,
but in the days to come and
 the days that pass,
and my love is threefold stronger.
For this I pray
with eyes, clenched tightly
and head jogging downward.
Oh, fill my life with
 what remains,
 what time cannot even steal,
With the concrete unseen,
I pray for the abiding.

Amazing Grace

Straightening
his brown faded, dented old hat,
the man
grabbed his rotting guitar
and stood in front of
the congregation
that stared at him
with squinting judgmental eyes
that roamed the room
in boredom and distrust.

The first strum
of the decrepit instrument
revealed that no attempt
had been made at tuning.

The first note
of "Amazing Grace" that
emanated forth from his graveled throat
revealed that the gift of music
had skipped a generation.

And when he had
finished the first verse,
those same eyes of the
congregations sitting in the padded mauve pews
now roamed the room
with vengeance.
A smirk played on the lips
of a middle aged woman
as she straightened her hair
and laughed openly
at the lack of talent of the man.
An older man looked at

the floor in embarrassment,
thinking dear God,
get this man out of here
before we all go deaf.

The young pastor was poised
like a predator
on the very edge of his chair,
contemplating pulling the man
away and cutting off the song
to alleviate
the discomfort of his church.

Now the man's eyes were closed
and his head lilted slightly to the music
he played
and he was completely enthralled
in his piece.
As the last notes echoed
through the spacious ceilings of
the unfriendly sanctuary,
no one clapped for the man.

He simply went away,
clutching his vile guitar
like a child in his arms.
"Thank you" he pronounced
smiling broadly.

When the service was over,
his "travesty" was the
talk of the coffee group gathering.
The man stood in the corner listening,
but did not care.
He had not sung for the congregation.
The graveled, off-pitch music he offered
was lifted much higher than the spires of the pretentious sanctuary,
the higher it went,
the more it was praised.



Stained Glass Faith

Sarah Blum

androgynous antennae

masculinity is my attire's message

as are minor details

and nearly - my physique

i hear people's thoughts

as i meander by,

"OH BROTHER"

"Oh Brother"

"Oh brother"

"oh, brother"

"oh, brothel"

"Oh brothel"

"Oh Brothel"

"OH BROTHEL"

that's where she belongs

-people judging cruelly

as i sashay by,

scantily clad,

nearly naked.

people wishing me modesty

-but i ignore their thoughts

for i enjoy who i am,

my femininity.

sculpture

I.

As I peer through the doorway
to gaze at you,
I feel your eyes caressing me
before you can view me
and I like it.

I relish knowing

I am in the midst of your thoughts,
envisioning myself
as the calm eye of a hurricane.

Your thoughts rage angrily
endlessly

But I am a muse to you,
to soothe you
with my existence,
and nothing else.

II.

So what if I am a monster
a beautiful creature to you,
and nothing else.

But I know what echoes inside my shell
a haunting, fearful sensation
where I am comfortable
with my evil tendencies.

Your slow caress would not be so
tender if you chose to see through
my glassy exterior.

III.

Did you know that you could break me?
I am only glass,
nothing more.

I only give myself to you
so I can be shattered.

I want nothing more.

i just can't even function anymore
look what you have done to me
what you have made of me.

i am so useless
so fragmented

i am distorted
distorting consistently everything you do
because you have planted in me a seed
of something...
is it evil?!?

i wish i knew,
but i don't think it is.
is it so wrong to rely on my perceptions
which beautify me
and sustain me
and strengthen me?

but again,
perhaps that is my distorted perception.
since i rely so much on you
and what little you convey to me
maybe i am weak beneath the pretty petty surface
of what you think you know so well.

beautification of me
by who?!?
YOU
and who are you to create anything of me
or plant anything in me?
i yield no authority to you,
which i scream with much conviction.
but here i am,
weaker than you or i could ever imagine.

thriving on you,
and what you think you know,
so that my true identity is hidden,
or so i think.
but maybe you have discovered the true me.
-a weak, helpless individual-
who wants you more than you know.

beautiful girl.

he says:
there's a beautiful girl
that looks like you and talks like you.

that's what he tells me
its been forever since i've been back.

he says:
right after you left
she started comin round
a beautiful girl and her beautiful face.

my beauty was never perfect
i never pretended it was.

he says:
she cracked once
chipped her beautiful enamel
cried then went away herself.

she hasn't been back either.

he says:
there's a beautiful girl out there
that looks like you and talks like you.

i laugh
because now he's lost her too.

i'm leaving you

you that's been with me
inside my head
for just that long
just long enough
for me to decide
exactly what i want

walking home last nite
i smelled you
tasted you
felt the echo of your cold hand on my thigh
and thought to myself
i know what i want exactly
but you are only almost

to ---

remember that time, the dishwasher? you ask
I'm sorry, I'm good at forgetting
but you already know that
you know me so well I'm terrified

you saw everything.
you
saw
me
shake shaking
still

you painted the lobby
helped install a decade's worth of
THE SCARRED MONUMENTS
you were the only one to ever question the sign
out front.

silence silence

grow grew grown.

so I don't understand
that desperate look,
to be or to have.
why?
my shadow's not so great,
and my name's not worthy of your arm.

yes, yes, too much beckett

but I never thought you needed a ticket
you're the only one in the lobby
and the museum is free on tuesdays

too many times you walked up to the door
never crossing that threshold
me not knowing what I'd do if you did

but tuesday's are always free
I'm sorry I never told you
but I thought...

I always knew
you saw it all
and remembered everything
as did I...of you

Journey into the Forest

On a frigid fall day, I left my house for the forest
As I went deeper within, the trees, now resplendent
With color, encircled me like an embracing grandparent
The colors of the leaves shone more beautifully
Than the stained glass windows of a church

Over rocks and dead leaves my feet shuffled
Animals of every kind were heard but not seen
The tiny mouse ran into its hole
The birds became silent as I passed
A raccoon's eyes glittered from a hollow stump

I thought I heard the whoop of a young boy
To my left and right I turned my head
A giggle, a laugh, some words in a foreign tongue
I felt a light tap on my shoulder
As I turned I saw the fading image of a black-haired boy

I came across a meadow of grass where deer were grazing
The does caught my sent and flipped their tails as they ran
But one stag, the patriarch of the herd, stood attentively
Its body gleaned with oily fur as it snorted wisps of white breath
Its immense rack, velvet shedding, told of the stag's age

I peered into its brown eyes and spoke to the majestic sight:
I will tell you of my human thoughts in a language you will know
Just as the natives who inhabited this land long ago
I will speak of my joy, of my loneliness, and of my fear
I will tell you of the inhumanity of mankind

Just as I had done, the stag stared at me as it nodded its head:
For long ago humans could talk to creatures of my kind
They said life is spiced with love
That of fate one has no control

That the golden strings have been cut
That one should never worry, but just accept

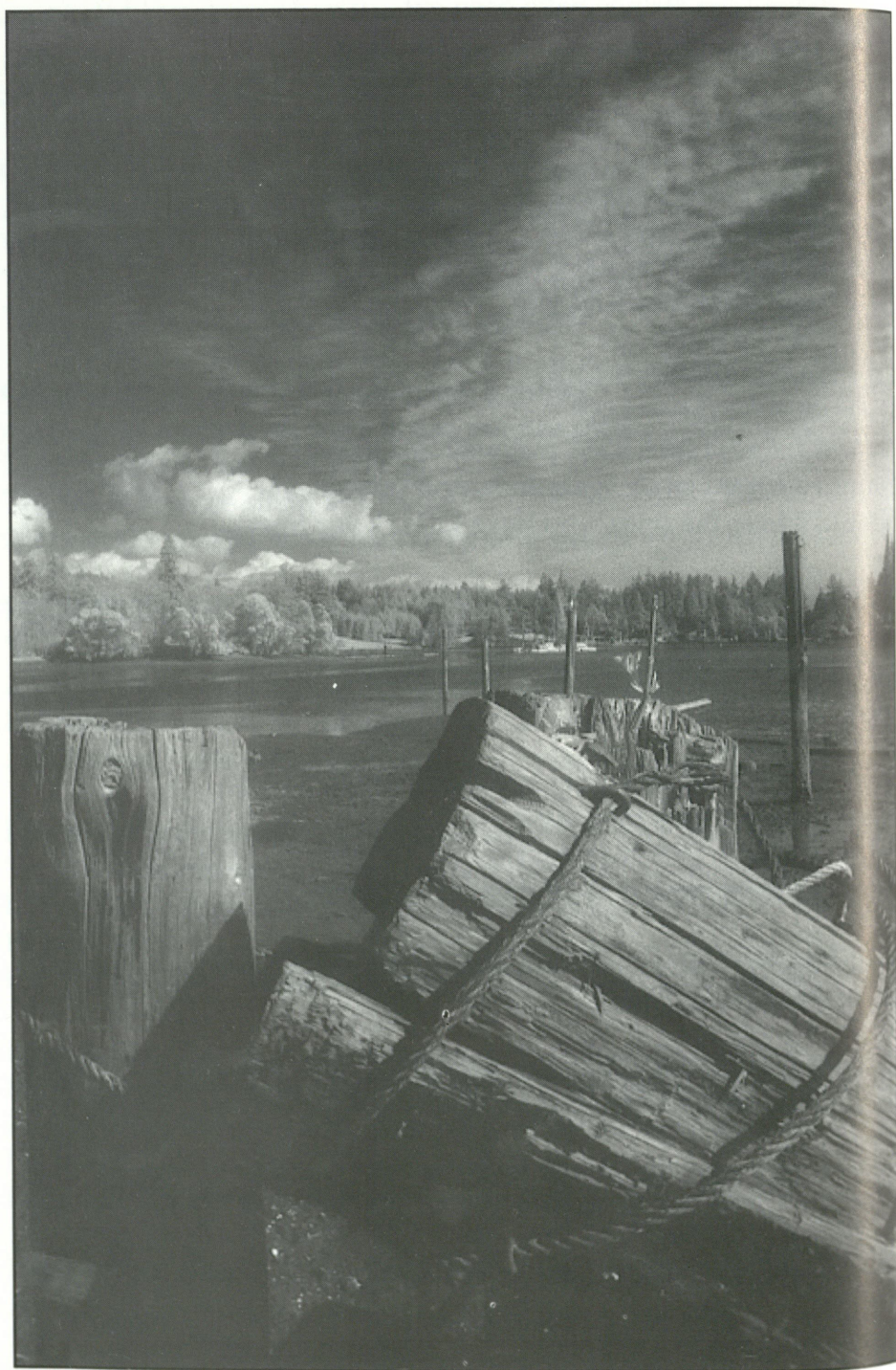
I exclaimed in a cloudy mist
My anger represented by tight fist:
O, creature of the woods!
Has age blurred your mind?
Should I accept all of life's vices?
Life is not what they told you!

I continued without breath:
O, creature of the woods!
Should I accept lust, hate, jealousy, and greed?
Should I accept sloth, ignorance, and prejudice?
Should I love the ones who have killed your forests?

The stag lowered its head and spoke:
Nay, my boy, those vices you mention are not here
Where do you find these terrible monsters within?

I answered sharply:
They lurk behind my inner soul, shrouded in dust
Like decaying food they spoil
Like a spider's web they stick
Like a python around my neck they suffocate

The stag stood proudly, more dignified than before:
Nay, again, young one
You have left those vices behind
Those black demons have not followed you
Because they know this forest is sacred land



Black Sky Inlet

Naomi Strom

Tickets for Two

The Black of Night, that patron of romance
Hides smiling Aphrodite from our view
Our cares subsided, our passions ignited
Tonight I have tickets for two

With a fluttering heart and a blush on my face
I knock softly, a timid child am I
You crack the door, "Just a minute," you say
Oh! What suffering as the hours fly!

A wicked invention this watch on my wrist!
A frugal machine, what good is it for?
Lovers are caught between its hands
Has it ever longed for one minute more?

Now the door opens and you step out
Adorned with youthful light
Cascading hair and a feminine charm
You are a grace to my eyes, a divine sight!

Love is immortal, a bridge spanning time
Forever this Eros I will cherish
It comforts my doubts, banishes my loneliness
Without you I'd certainly perish

Love is the theophany of a Hindu god
Manifested in love you will find May's traces
Divine, demonic, casual, nuisance
Indeed, I tell you, love has these faces

Love is suffering described by Capellanus
For Aristophanes, a comedic pursuit of the whole
Socrates claimed it was a possession of the good
A statement from Diotima he stole

Although these thoughts are from the wisest of minds
And many of these definitions suffice
Text fails to embrace love's rapture
Love without emotion is no more than ice

If great literary works lack the flavor
Never finding this spice is our fear
To look with our eyes we would deceive
We must listen with hand cupped to ear

Ellington, Porter, the Gershwins, and Berlin
Knew that Notes and Lyrics coupled gladly
In a staff-lined bed to conceive Jazz
Love exists between "Solitude" and "Love You Madly"

To think that love is but song
The fuel that animates dance
Of the stars in the black sky
I found you by chance

With these thoughts I take your hand
Into the ocean of darkness we sail
To see the world with another's eyes
We are explorers on love's trail

I must be the most fortunate of men!
If Jazz defines love so true
To hold in one hand my lover
And in my other hand tickets for two

Target

It was not the lashes that stung
but rather

the bit of potato that hung
on my brow.

Helga's aim being quite precise.

I heard her say,
"I'm not the one
who's going to pay
for this fucking lawyer,"
clear through the vent
in my room
above theirs.

Foolishly
put at stake
what I thought was
ten dollars worth of pot.
in him, what I meant
to her.

And knowing now,
ran my tongue
across
dull incisors.

Fairuzian Eye

Neither the lamp's yellow light
nor the sun

can illuminate
this dim, cloudy air.

Graciously then,
the windows there
ask the curtains
to let out their thread

so that she,
shining turquoise,
may light it instead.

Cube

It is only a cube
which you enter into.
It is cold and sterile,
and even the phone
looks as if it has never rung.

There is a frame with a mattress
in the corner,
the desk is not far from it.
The only look of comfort
is the color in the chair,
but as you continue to look
you wonder - how much
comfort can it hold
when it looks so stiff.
Just looking at the closet
you sigh, there's no way
your stuff will fit.
Another drab and empty room
to try again to fill.

You try to claim it
as your own
with color and with life.
You bring in carpet, put up posters,
put a comforter on your cot,
and bring in a little light.
With each day you bring in more and more,
and the cube becomes
your room, but fast
do those days go by and
it comes time to leave again.
You wonder where the hours
have gone and how to leave
your laughing, crying,

screaming, sighing walls.

It is only slowly that you again
strip the room of the life you once gave.

Everything is finally packed
and your car is ready to go.

But as you look back at your room
for one last time

tears stream down your face.

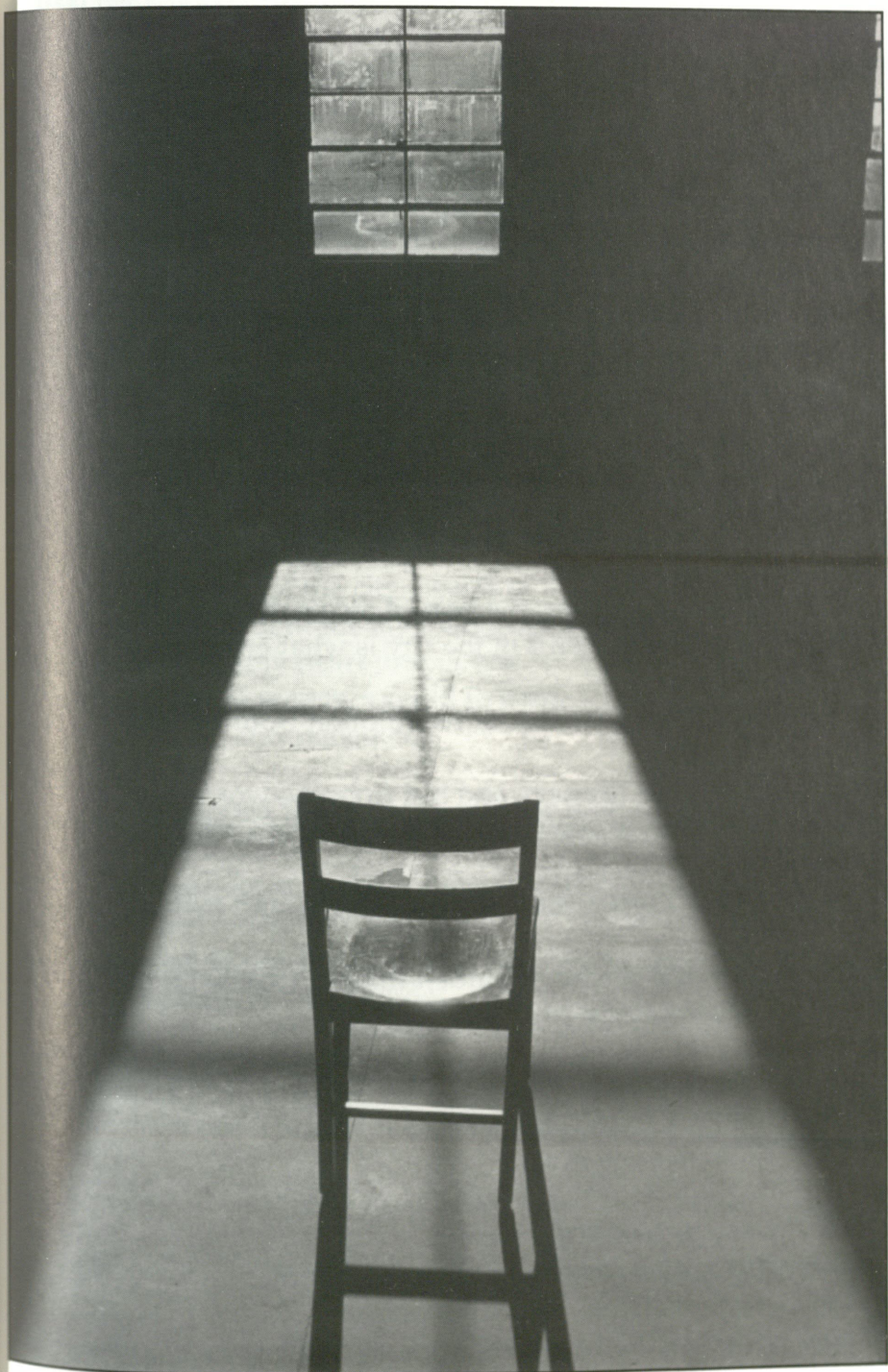
For what your eyes now see,
where your familiar and animated
room had once been,
is the bareness from before.

Had only you before realized,
you would not have looked back
a final time to see,

that what once had been

a room to some,
would always be

only a cube.



the chair #5

Keiko Oyama

The Old Man Who Hears All

I sit in my room, the still night air avoiding my open windows,
Keeping my room hot and stank, providing me no relief.
My records belch out their music, an amazing medley no other
Human being would relish. I listen for the sounds of the night.
I have long since surrendered to their seduction, unable to ignore
them,

I embrace them, and thrill to the secret knowledge they provide.

The flow of the wind carries me no relief from the hot night,
But it does carry the dark words and deeds to my ears.
The sounds of the night are wafted to my room on the cooling
breeze, but

Only the sounds reach me, the heat of men's deeds reach my ears.
Perhaps the burning horror of the city is what encases the heat in
my room,

Chasing the cooling pleasure of redemption from my life.

Long ago I covered my ears, and hid from the words I heard,
Hid from the sounds some dark trick of acoustics carried to my
domain.

No more. Now I listen, embracing the night, and making love to
secrets.

I have become the keeper of hidden things. I know all the tales
and deeds of the city.

Dark deeds, and fateful secrets. Consummation, and violation.
Joy and oblivion.

All these things I know, I have heard it all and done it all, and
wish to hear no more.

I know who dies before the papers.

I know who has been robbed before the victim.

I know who is mugged, before the police,

I know who is raped, before the cursed child begins to grow.

I know who will be killed, before the act is done

I never see the men and women I hear, and I never will.
My window commands a view of brick and mortar,
No cloud ever graces my eyes,
No sweet child is seen playing on the street,
No happy couples are seen on the sidewalk,
And no group of friends are seen, boisterously jaunting down the
street.

I hear none of the pleasant things in life,
But the horrors reach my ears with perfect clarity.
I hear the thunder and explosions, preceding the blackout,
I hear the mother scream for her missing daughter,
I hear the woman panic as her rapist murders her lover,
I hear the guns and cries of fire fights between the gangs.

I have lived here for ten long years, alone and in pain.
Privy to the secrets of the city, hearer of all that is done.
This is the Punishment for my own dark deeds.
My eyes disused, my heart untouched,
I am the keeper of secrets, too old to help,
I can only listen, and remember.

The Heat is trapped in my room, and the dark sins of the city echo
within it.

I cannot escape, for my crimes have taken my mobility,
I hear the cries of fear and pain,
Once so sweet to me, but now that I no longer cause them,
They are nothing but a reminder,
A grotesque form of vengeance, coming to torture me,
To exact its own form of justice.

A Kiss Before We Die

You forgot to ask if
I trust you,

say you want it so bad
it's killing you,
killing us,
you swear

it will feel so good.
But now it hurts,
clenching my throat
between your paws,
I shake my head
and push your chest
hard,
I say

I've found you
can't grasp a
heart by tugging
at a belt loop.

you know it's
true but
you swear,
innocent.
you reach again
fingers threaten

Just say it now
before you go

release?
no

give me the chance to
break your heart
before I do.
It feels so good.

Postcards

In the static backgrounds
Lie a university, a shoreline,
the stadium where the angels play.
The portrait of a sun-kissed day, an
illuminated night.

The Christmas parade passes
only days before Thanksgiving.
Santa's wearing Bermuda shorts
in the center of California
singing we are the world, while
holding hands with Snow White's
dwarves.

Cover model Jesus floats through
the crowd on papier-mache,
beauty-queen wave intact as
a muscular Greek looks on.

I've suffocated your postcards,
the ones you sent from Orange County.
I suffocated them in static-backed
cellophane, over your pictures.

Concert

Darkness' bottom filters through
a sieve of stars and clouds,
alights on a teardrop,
a quadrangle in the grass.

We watch it trickle down,
together apart,
as each darkness brings promise
of union.

It arrives
with paradoxical sensation,
and we listen through
our pensive tranquillity.

Heirloom

We come from a long
line of women
who love too much.

It gets too large for us
makes us walk at night
wait by the phone
hope for a ring.

It has crazed many of us,
but we still
pass it on,
stuff it in an envelope,
and seal it with a guilt trip.

Our sweet babies shear
mama's curls
in favor of a buzz,
and hope to escape.
Like we did.

And where is the
advantage to growing up;
we're alone and no longer cute?

Besides, the voices remind,
"you never were beautiful, but
now that you mention it
your face *has* lost its bloom."

The senior picture
hangs in testament.
Sure, we're calm
until the voices leave us,

alone
in our self-hatred,

But then we cry
and nobody says,
"Bring me your sad-clown
face, and I will
kiss it."

And there's no one left
who can make it
better again.

21

or My Version of the ideal love poem, if I were to ever write one.

When I drive
down a curving road
at night,

I listen
and know
how easy it would be
to snap the wheel
hard
to the right
and fall.

And I know I never
will;
I keep two hands
on the speed limit
and go
wherever I am headed

And I confess
I don't know
who I am.

I'm a child
an old lady
and I wear it all on my sleeve
like cream of wheat crust
from the morning.

And I confess
I don't know
who you are.

Do you know
what you wear
underneath your body?

Wear your humanity
as your garment,
not this,
not this smile,
these manners.

Who are you
when no one's looking?
when you aren't
polite
interested
generically kind?

Don't hide your
milk mustache,
the spinach between your teeth
the holy underwear
in your drawer
you won't throw away.

I want to know
what makes you live,
wake up every morning,
make it through the day.

And I wonder if you
know, if you can tell me
why I should?

Infirm Like You

In the stained-glass dimness
they knelt on the
dried-blood-colored benches,
and she knelt with the congregation,
not facing them.

Listening to the father's incantation,
they bowed their heads, praying
through the opaqueness of their eyelids.
They were not bowing to her.

Rubbing beads smooth,
they all muttered prayers
in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
They were not praying for her.

Drawing themselves upright,
they crossed their hearts, parting
in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

As she left the congregation,
she remembered dipping her finger
in holy water
and leaving it pink.

Shooting Tomorrow

She lies alone
in that musty box
of an apartment.
Imprisoned by naked
walls she waits
to turn her next
trick.

Flickering neon lights
outside her window
forbids
sleep.

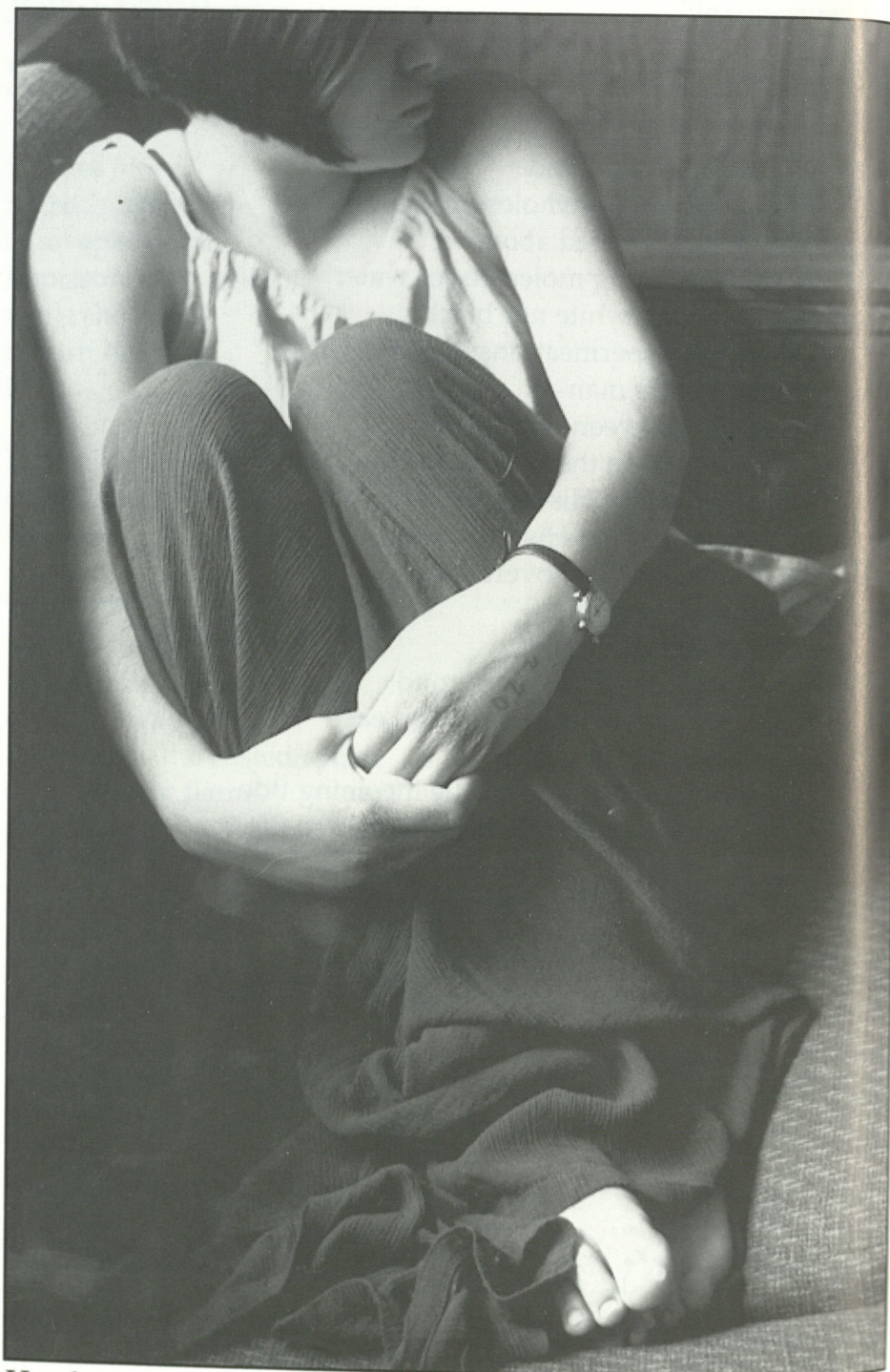
Sitting carefully
by a candle in the center
of her cell, a shaky
hand holds the rusted spoon
over a lonely flame,
preparing her evening
dinner.

Holding back
tears, she drives
a needle into
flesh, searching
for a vein not
yet destroyed.

She shoots tonight
to be sane
tomorrow.

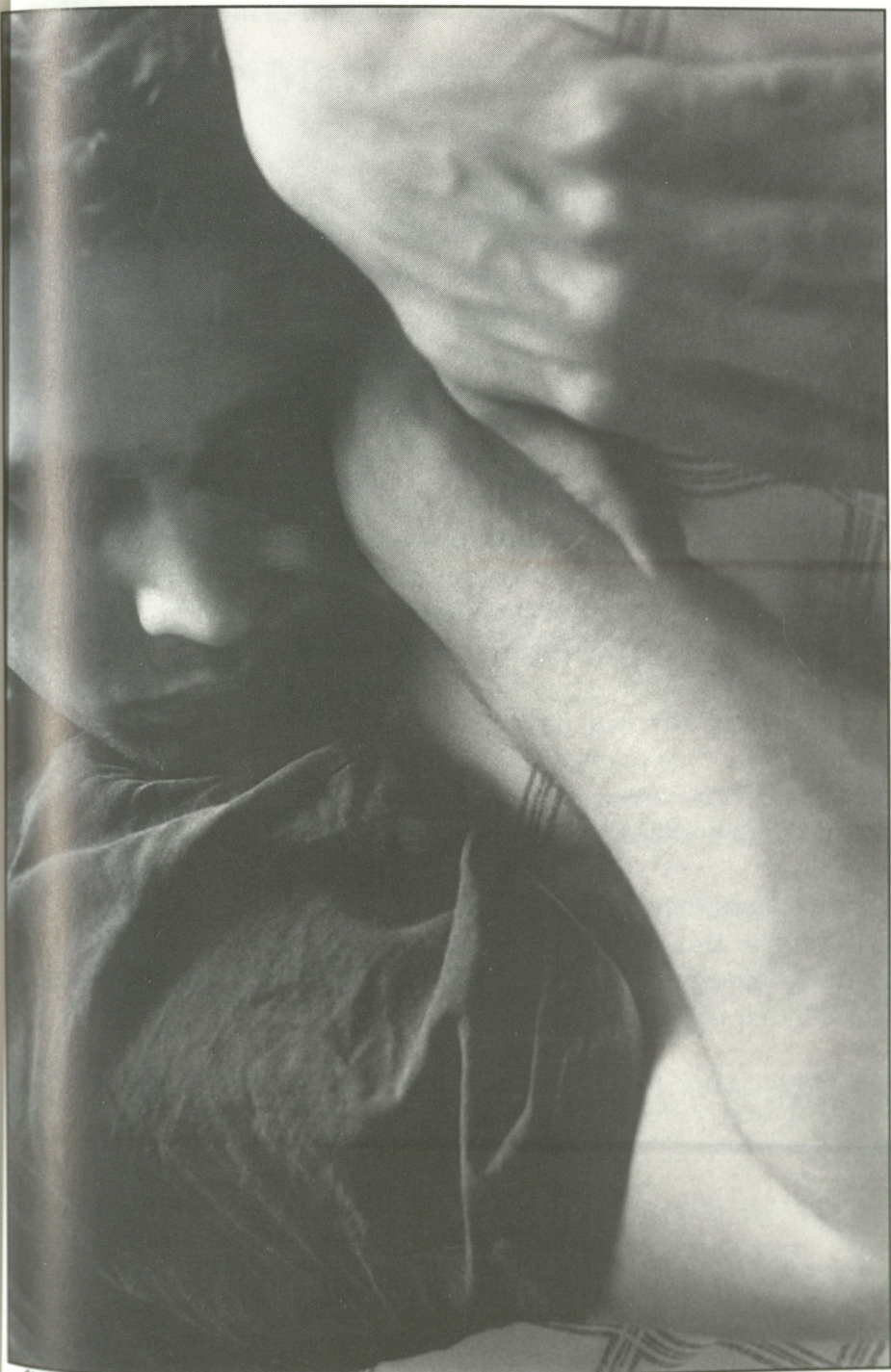
Resurrection

The heavy shroud had lifted
 transporting into wholesome readiness
Yet it's cloud still hovered above
 with threatening molecules of water
The shroud was not white nor black,
 but held the permeations of each quality
To her it felt like the man
 mounted between two thieves
For this divine mirage the severity
 was meant by His creator
It would take more than His three days
 to accumulate her sovereignty
Still, the window was pried
The currents blew through it,
 now brushing aside the shroud
And the light beams crackled through each
 perspiring billow of sky
While her readiness awaited by the incoming tide
 to carry her onward through this steep night



Handan

Keiko Oyama



pfirsichmomokazeladi

Keiko Oyama

Mafiosi

Stained hands carried old
fedoras from their homelands.
La promesa was covenanted
in front of a cathedral while bells tolled
magnificent melodies to the earth.
He walked alone

for the last time to meet
his young bride in his new master's
house. Passionate air carried-beloved
smells down the cobbled street to his mouth.
He tasted the bloody marinara sauce,
and the essence of grappa swaying
in the wind put him in a semi-drunken state.

At this dream's arrival, he knocked
and the door was opened
by a tiny black-haired girl who greeted
him in Sicilian dialect, "Ven. Ven."

He embraced his entrance to this
new world...But ending the uncomfortable
silence, "Ho venuto per tua padre."

Antoinette Marie Picco

Her voice:

My father's will was done.
Heavy with fury, I took
your name. But now
prison chains became your arms
wrapped around me. Quietly,

I wake in love
but I can only whisper it,
So I give you Antoinette,
for her cries

will carve my name
into your heart.

America

His voice:

Lady of liberty wave your torch at me.
I see the freedom, you
give in the other's eyes.
Stop terrorizing me with painful

reminders of being uprooted.
I hear the cold winds singing the sorrowful
song "Core' n grato" of Italy.
(But Godfather has given his word.)

If I come here to marry
his little girl; our families will mingle
together in the flow of the future.

This will give peace to my brother
only to disembark the ship,
I feel as if I'm leaving my past...
I'm afraid to let go...

But I must
rejoin the others. For now,
I will stand on the Promised Land.

Forsaken

Pitiful people approached their savior
armed with bullets of envy.
Oh sheep, who have strayed.
Your innocence shattered from guns.

Gurgling blood arose from three holes of freedom.
The cry was heard
throughout the skies,
"Son, forgive them. For they know not what they do."

Baptismal waters dropped
from one little boy's eyes.
Pappa...
Pappa...

Sunday Driving

I ride in the passenger seat
As you steer us toward a new horizon
Sun gleaming through the glass
And falling onto our arms.
In the distance ahead, a billboard rises boldly
And captures our squinting glances
"The Stuff That Dreams Are Made Of," it reads.
A half-hearted laughter escapes from your throat
I turn to find its source.
A golden glow seems to pour from your profile
And I can see dust stir and swirl around you
Like a thousand tiny fairies
Which flit from off of the tip of your tongue and your lips,
Now reclining into a smirk.

You are saying something else of dreams now
And how time creeps silently past us all
Like in the painting that
We poured over one rainy Sunday last May.
We cannot remember the artist's name--
(Was it Chagall?)
The title, however, does not escape us.
"Time Is A River Without Banks," you sigh.

But you are not the only one who speaks to me now.
The gentle breeze which wisps through my hair
From outside and embraces us with its chill
Seems to whisper,
"All is right with the world."

A few miles up the road,
We see lights contrasting red and blue
And we know that the fates have somehow collided.
I reach for my seat belt as you light a cigarette

And tap lightly on the brakes,
Arresting our cruise.

Our thoughts like anchors--
Falling, they must stop somewhere.

Rigormortis

Deep in the bronze frost
an Ohio town prepares for night.

The horse's neighs are stifled
the geese's flights conclude.

Deep in twilight limbo
the shadows stretch their length.

A heavenly star is born
as the Heavenly star has died.

Lost in a pale-lit moon
Darkness claims its domain.

The death of the sun
gives way to morbid despair.

The smell of winter cuts
into the nose of a curious owl.

A withered rose hangs languid
as if to bow its beautiful conclusion.

Lygia, was it a day or a year?
Was it you or I?

My dying rose, was it she
or I?

Deep in a lake of solitude
ripples pierce my coma.

Crickets sound their symphonic requiem
as the night lights retire their radiance.

Night has come, night will stay
and my lovely rose, art not sick, but dead.

Be not curious, stupid owl,
and find out where she went!

Beyond on the flipside
you will find my lost soul.

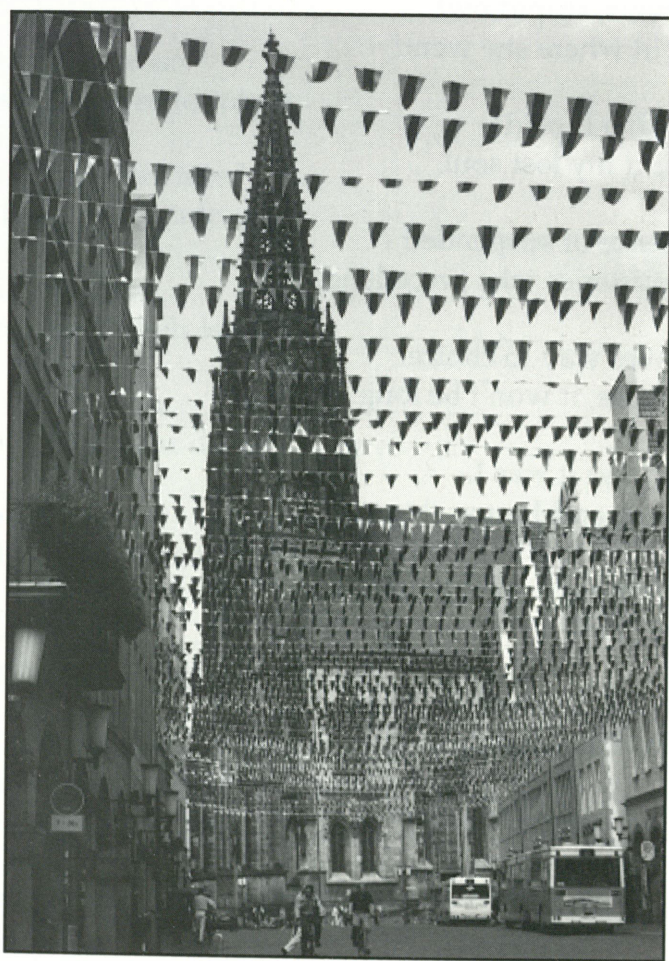
In the patience of suspended
reunion, mysteries take precedence

and fate gives way to choice.
My lovely rose, it won't be long.

It was you, and it was I.
Night is here, and I must sleep.

So look to the sky, a new star
is born, has died.

And all is well on the other side.
Goodnight Ohio, Goodbye.



Munster

Sarah Blum

Nelly

Nelly's feet plunked like small ink stampers
Across the sand. Her only clothes,
Huggies and pink sun hat, flopped as she ran
And her smooth stomach punched out
Far in front of her baby flat chest.

Josh, her cousin was with her, walking
A gangly step behind.
He let Nelly wander out across the beach
So she wouldn't bother the old
Grandfolk with their white knees
Tucked beneath the shady pavilion
Or see the two strangers necking
In the full, heavy sun

At that far end of the beach
She and Josh dug lion size holes and crouched
Over the water-shiny stones at the lake's edge, amazed.

Every now and then, Josh peeked
The other way. *With their hands and faces stapled
Together they could have been a single lizard,
Fat with fresh lunch, lying,
Digesting it there on a blanket in the sun.*
Once, Nellie caught Josh looking
Away and jabbed him in the thigh
With a speckled stone to bring
His attention back to her
The stones, sand, and water.

When they had captured
The prettiest pebbles, they clutched
Them in their hands and steered
Back toward the pavilion.

Nelly, watching the sand
Kick off her feet,
Ended up in front of the strangers,
With Josh only a step or two behind.

*The two had fallen from the blanket;
Sand stuck to their backs and arms like molting scales
And they seemed to have no eyes
Only fingering hands and pulsating chests*
Josh dropped his stones and picked Nelly up
With his arms. For a moment they stood still, staring
At the slow plunging revelry before them.
Then, he holding her, walked away.

Nelly's warm breath tickled his face. Her smooth
Baby chest lay flat against his
And it was all he could do to hold her.

A Pentacost

I.

This cool, wet ash
Rubbed between our palms is past.
It is a history of fire
Stamped clean of all but the image,
And a touch of ash.

The hand remembers the weight
Of the thing last carried
And the mind recalls its shape
For a time. But for us,

Behind closed doors, the black rooster
Night cowers us into a tight, mute circle
And from face to face a terror silently rises.

Orpheus, we are trying not to look back,
But the image slips

Away and our palms are all only ash.

II.

But still, though there is no thought in it,

We press our sooted hands together.
They are all that connect us

To a hollow, hollow longing left
In the gut of that silent terror. But, we have nothing left
To expect and soon our faces slide down

To rest heavily in the ash on our fingers. Our hands stop
And all becomes a bitter and silent longing
For every trace of the fire is gone. But as we are

Hollow, empty, a word sounds

Still as baby's breath. It is a word, and oh! it is Word
For we had been looking to touch and looking to see
But now echoes in us what we had not sought,
The Word, which sounds louder and unshakable
Ignites our palm's ash to consuming, unquenchable fire.

Peas

He would eat his peas only one by one
And most were mashed
When and if they made it to his golem lips.
Grandfather had not eaten so many this night,
But succeeded in skidding
Most of them off his plate to the floor
Where they bounced and rolled and finally
Planted themselves in the shaggy carpet.
I picked up those I could
Find under his feet
On hands and knees
And chewed them there unconsciously
Because I had no other place to put them.

When I stood again
The dishes were gone, but he still looked
Down where the peas had been
A crowd of fragile memories.

Fireflies

The sun, flame and rust, descends
into this shattered glass of river water,
glistening like a thousand diamonds
scattered across blue shadowed silk.

An enormous pearl starts to rise
from a deep dark ocean of evergreen
trees, black sea blooms crashing
against an ash horizon.

The dying sun and smiling moon call
each other in sayshays of light,
pouring down on honey-colored hills
where two speck-like children play

Alone, near an empty white house,
naked bronze feet wander
from hollowed windows now forgotten
in fields where phantoms are fireflies

Dancing over kingdoms of the dead
cornstalks, flickering in the changing hymns
of wind, Mama's empty porch swing creaks
into the distance of twilight.

No voice will call them home tonight
only broken lullabies of a cricket's choral,
humming, two small shadows stand alone
watching the moon rise in an empty sky.

Prelude

in the beginning was the Word, and the word shone
past love like no other,
past the love of your mother,
passed poems of poems
poem becomes Rosetta stone.

i.
in medias res, dawning
no noche triste descending, becoming...
Shine. Resplendent cornucopia of enlightenment
Shine on Shrine of Calliope!
Truth, ashes, past: shone.

Calliope,
and Nastes strutting into battle decked in gold like a girl,
the fool!

or was it your father's, the 'must have been deformed'
Padre of Praeneste, he wore his left foot bare
the other in a rawhide boot.

That is:
Cave maw, glittering smokily...
Precious fillings, crowded thrones.

ii.
Crown of thrones (for pack rats)
more to follow...

iii.
Future librarians, welcome,
say, can you type? (it's all the rage)
hold your ear down close to the conch
and see, can you hear the Information
Age?

iv.

When was it last we spoke,
I mean, when our paths broke?
Now this looming illumination
When I know the dawn,
Shine,
When I feel the night.
Cave maw, chuckling.

Was that you in ivy sleeves,
Tendrils caught in sunlight,
So bright we hid among cedar trees,
Shouldered in the mountain's passes,
Was that you or merely ashes?

v.

Archived facsimiles smile and fade,
Shrine of Calliope
Crumble under Roman arches
oh lift...

Precarious dental work on the cave's shadowy smile.

Canto LKKIII en Ingles

and Dona Marina still telling Montezuma's shade
that Cortez didn't mind the sad night.

Cronos Cries

Gnarled pelt of a coat,
Tears wash dirt with salt,
Precursor to God, howling:

"Strong fences and your body beneath mine, Rhea,
Splintering flak from axe on block,
Eyes' apples ripening to plant themselves
Or this burr ferried in my hair,
Where shall they go?

"Take my wild eyes,
Bear them far by the river's bend,
My hunger might consume their skies
Might bend their stories to my end.

"Sweet wife, take from me these eyes,
Hide me from my growing need,
Let the stormy son arise
And snuff my crimson fingered greed.

"But quickly, stab sister!

"Bury these eggs of terror
Or snakes be their birthright,
And their stolen dawn breaking in my fever!

"Induced my wretchedness!
Down, Down, Down, Down, Down
Drown among my gullet's surge
All six swaddled, swallowed as they leave your thighs!
The last nearly choked me, Dear--

"Hold me, for I hold destiny at bay
And find the pit of my burden
Grown sour and ulcerous as rotten fruit.

"The tall cedar and make my bed!
Crumble columns, topple throne,
I know you sister, know the stone
I fed upon as godhead.

"Cycle stars, I'll lay and wane.
Oh Mother, must we all produce
A history to keep our name?"
Cries Cronos to a waxing Zeus.

Divine

Locked away among these shelves
Are hidden lives and unfathomed wells...
The Symphony Fantastique jumps through chap-bitten lips
Like a dirty-orange tiger in a New Haven circus.

Sunlight bursts through old leather bindings,
Creates the creaking rendition of a ball,
Splashes into a breathy whistle in the hall...
Breaks the monotony of a page.

The paper's gone yellow with age,
Yellowing, ancient and sitting on the shelves.

By the statue's garden, that graveyard of art,
That warren of rats and good intentions
Cornered by a crossing of liquor stores and foreign foods,
There appeared the great double doors,
Doors wide as the horizon,
A horizon rising behind steps
To doors and a pile of marble chips.

There are no transepts, unfinished,
The dome is a misty night with no stars,
Above is the darkness and maybe a ceiling.

Great plywood constructs block the cross,
There are no transepts, under construction,
Over a hundred years under the spell of construction
And the sculptures over the side doors sleep deeply
Hidden away from a form or corruption, slumber,
Snuggling down within white marble,
Or slowly, slowly creep out of their cocoons.

The Rose Window bleeds light down the nave,
Red, green, and blue blood drips onto the pews,
Runs into a rivulet trickling with the sound of coins.
The shadows march away down the aisles,
Past alcoves of stony visaged saints
Whose eyes do not fit their smiles,
Whose eyes follow one for miles.

They open: the doors, the transepts, the eyes.
They awaken again, awaken with *ite, missa est*
On cracking marble lips, hands fused together in prayer,
They awaken to Berlioz, snap their fingers
While they march to the scaffold.

They are unfinished as their sepulchral dwelling.
Their faults drop like scales from the face of the artisan
Giving birth right above the door.



Face

Iain Cook

The Cow

Late one night, at least late for a ten-year-old, my brother Brian called me to our front door. He seemed excited, so I excitedly ran to him. We stood on our brown linoleum landing staring out of a window embedded in the wall beside the door. I stared with him, but I was unsure of what was so exciting.

"Is that a cow out there?" Brian asked.

"Where?"

He pointed. Of course it was dark, so the point was worthless. He saw me blindly looking out of the small window, searching our front yard for a cow. He decided to help me.

"Right beside our mailbox."

Sure enough, there was a cow standing in the middle of the road by our mailbox. From this distance the cow blended in with the night. It was a brown cow, no spots, no white streaks, simply plain brown.

"Should we go get her?" I asked.

My brother, older and wiser, looked at me impatiently and said:

"What the hell would we do with a cow?"

That explanation made perfect sense to me, so I decided to be quiet. We stared at the cow; not because we had never seen a cow before (it could have been a giraffe for all we cared), it was simply out of place.

I grew tired of looking at the cow. I opened the door and stepped onto our porch. I decided it was time to approach the animal. As I walked down our steep sloping driveway, I noticed how skinny the cow was. It looked like a shrunken dark brown potato balancing on four toothpicks. Most of the cows I had seen before were much beefier, much stronger and more stable looking. This one must belong to Mr. Philips. He didn't treat his animals very well. I always pitied his animals. Their pasture had only small grass islands surrounded by a vast ocean of worthless dirt and filth. There was nowhere near enough hay and grass to feed these normally large creatures. I always hoped his cows would escape, break

out of Mr. Philips' decrepit fence and run to a better place. Like all of his cows, this one was pathetic.

Brian was following me down our driveway. We weren't sneaking up on the cow, but we were extremely cautious and quiet. We felt courageous approaching this beast; at any moment this cow could go crazy and charge. We knew it wasn't exactly a bull, but neither of us were exactly matadors either. So we were careful. We daringly crept closer and closer, but the cow simply stood still. It showed absolutely no interest in us. This was insulting and I wanted action. We stopped about twenty feet away and I found a rock. My brother gave me a nod. I did my best mimic of a pitcher, and zipped the rock at the cow. Miss. I picked up a bigger rock, took about five steps closer, and launched it at the large target. I hit it this time. We waited, we waited for the pain to kick in (I assumed it took longer for a cow to feel the pain of a thrown rock). But the cow just stood there minding her own business. I couldn't let the cow win, so I threw another rock. Same result. The cow simply did not notice or did not care. That was good enough for my brother and I to assume this was a friendly cow.

"Touch her," Brian whispered.

"You touch her, I threw the rocks."

"Yeah, and a lot of good that did, she didn't even feel it. I should have thrown them, at least she would have felt that."

"At least I'm not afraid to touch her," I dumbly replied. That was such a stupid thing to say, now I had to touch the cow. I walked up to the cow whistling so that I wouldn't startle it. The cow smelled worse than dry rotten eggs. Its sides were caked with mud and filth. There was a layer of dust and dirt covering her body. I wanted to push her into the pond across the street; I wanted to give this neglected animal some relief. Instead I found a comparatively clean spot and poked her. My brother joined me. We stood in the middle of the road poking the cow as if we were not sure if it was real or not. Only the smell assured us of her realism. Then I got brave.

I yelled giddily, "Watch this Brian!" as I slapped the cow hard on its side. Dust flew everywhere. I inhaled the filth. My mouth felt like I had been chewing on chalk. I coughed, "Dirty cow." My brother laughed as I stepped away from the dusty animal.

"Stay here, I'm going to go get dad," Brian said.

"Why?"

"We don't want her to go anywhere, do we?"

I agreed, not exactly sure where the cow would go, or exactly sure what I would do to prevent her from going there. But Brian was older and wiser, so I waited.

"So...what are you doing there...cow?"

The cow looked at me, she seemed annoyed. I was not exactly sure what to say next. I had never really spoken with a cow before. After realizing that I had nothing else to say, the cow slowly tilted her head back towards the ground. I thought about how odd it must have looked, the cow and I standing in the middle of the road. Just standing there.

It was such a silent night. I was not used to being outside, alone, this late. I looked at the pond across the street, it was calm. The pond was man-made, so it was extremely round. It sits in the middle of the cornfield. There was this large, empty cornfield with a pond surrounded by trees in the middle. The trees circle the pond all the way around except for one gap directly across from my house. When I look out of the upstairs window I can see into the pond. The only clear view is from our house, I feel that it is our pond. That night it looked different though. Directly behind the pond was the moon.

The moon was huge that night. I could almost see the craters from the street. I felt like the moon was there for my sole enjoyment. It glared into the pond. I held up my hands in front of my face, I formed a rectangle with them. I wished for a real camera. I took a mental picture and vowed to never forget it. This scene was for me, I was sure of that. The tranquil black pond shined with the moon's distorted glare. The moon's image was captured in the pond; the pond's ripples made the moon's reflection roll before me. I had never before noticed how beautiful the pond was. I wanted desperately to share this moment with someone, instead I was with a dull, dirty brown cow.

My dad must have been asleep, because I was alone with the cow for a long time. I decided it was time to make friends with my companion. I walked around the skinny animal so that I faced her. Her eyes looked fake. They looked like huge dark marbles. If I would have clapped my hands on both sides of her head, I am positive that the eyes would have popped out. She looked at me as if

she knew what I was thinking. I felt sorry for her and wanted to leave.

Before I could go, my brother and father came out of the house with a loud slam of the door. They came to me. To sound intelligent I said:

"The cow is sick."

My dad agreed. He said, "I called the police, they will be here any minute to take care of this."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because I don't want to deal with it right now."

That made sense to me. We waited for about ten minutes, my dad pointed out some stars and commented on how big the moon looked. Finally, a police car approached.

Mr. Philips and Sheriff Crisco stepped out of the car. Mr. Philips was dirty. Even this late he was dirty. I could tell that his jeans were previously caked with mud and dirt and manure. I could tell that the filth had been allowed to dry and break off in filthy, matted chunks. I imagined his wife, how she probably had to yell at him everyday to take his boots and pants off before entering the house. But he probably did not care. She was probably just as filthy as he. I pictured them sitting around their messy house, with their dirty little kids, and their dirty little dog. They weren't doing anything, simply sitting around watching a fuzzy TV and eating food off unwashed plates. I tried hard to imagine him clean. I removed his red Marlboro racing hat and his red, torn flannel shirt and I placed him in one of my dad's suits. I parted his hair which was no longer greasy because eventually even greasy hair dries. It was like a lump of matted hair still shaped as if his hat was still there. I pictured the wad of hair clean and neatly parted to the left. I looked at the whole image. He looked ridiculous. Some people are meant to be dirty, and this man was one of them.

My thoughts were interrupted immediately - the cow was moving. I guess she didn't like the commotion, so she decided to leave. She started walking down the street, she appeared not to have a worry in the world. Mr. Philips decided to go get her. The cow wanted to be alone, so she began to trot. Then the sheriff and Philips began chasing her. The cow started to run. I had never seen a cow really run before. Her legs were way too skinny for her body, she ran like Sheriff Crisco, neither looked comfortable moving at

that speed. We followed behind the cow yelling at her to come back, but this only made her go faster. Then she disappeared into the woods.

Sheriff Crisco puffed out, "We can't just leave her."

"Why not?" I said, "at least she will have something to eat out there."

My father urged me to be quiet, but I was beginning to like this cow and I wanted to make sure Mr. Philips would feed her from now on.

"I guess we should go in after her," said Crisco.

Everyone agreed, but no one moved.

My brother volunteered us, "We know these woods better than anyone else here, we'll go get her."

I didn't particularly like this idea. I wanted the cow to be free. I liked the idea of a wild cow on the loose. I would go visit her and ride her (I had gained a new respect for the cow's awkward yet speedy retreat to the woods).

My brother and I entered the woods. We were supposed to surround the cow and flush her out to where the men were waiting. I was excited. All of those days of playing army were finally going to come in handy. As we entered the woods, I noticed how much brighter it was than I thought it would be. Of course, I had never been in the woods that late before, but I knew it shouldn't be that light out. I couldn't see very well, but I could make out where I was going.

"Is it always this bright at night, Brian?"

"No, only when the moon is big."

"Where do you think she is?"

"Who?"

"The cow."

"Probably down by the creek," Brian said.

So we headed to the creek. Along with being amazed how much light there was, I was also astonished by how wet it was. It seemed so much dryer out in the open. My camouflage sweatpants were getting soaked wading through the high grass and weeds. The pants clung chillingly to my legs. They were uncomfortable and heavy, but also refreshing. I was curious as to how my brother knew where to go, but I was afraid to ask, he made the whole search look easy. So I tried to be sneaky in asking him how he knew.

"Do you think she's much farther?"

"No," he said, "her path leads straight ahead, and I doubt she would cross the creek."

My brother was right, we found the cow. She was standing by the creek, not moving, not eating, simply standing.

"How are we going to get her back," I asked.

"We could push her."

That sounded like an awful idea, I wasn't going to push her. You can't just push a cow.

I said, "Won't she kick us?"

"Maybe," my brother said, obviously over looking this, "But we could use sticks."

My brother grabbed a long, thick stick and whipped the rear of the cow. I could not think of what to say. He whipped her several times before I yelled:

"What are you doing!"

"I'm getting her to move, don't spazz out, it's just a cow."

"It obviously isn't working, you idiot, the cow isn't moving at all. Let me try."

"Do you want the stick," he asked.

Of course I wanted the stick. I walked to the beaten, tired cow and petted her like a dog. The cow was frightened. I placed my hand upon the cow's neck, right before her thick neck skin met the base of her skull. I started pulling, being careful not to pop her bulging eyes out. Surprisingly to me, the cow began to move. I was actually leading the animal. I walked her out of the woods with my brother trailing behind. We exited the woods and walked towards the men. My father looked at me proudly, the other two looked amazed. I realized how dark the woods really were when we walked into the bright moon's glare. I was proud of my accomplishment. I had shown how unnecessary force was. I had shown how gentleness and respect towards animals works.

I was standing proudly by the cow, we had become friends. I then noticed that I was the only one standing by the cow, everyone else was about ten yards away. The sheriff told me to step away from the cow. My father told me to go home. What had I done wrong? Why should I go? If it weren't for me the cow would still be in the woods. I asked why.

"Son, it's time for you to go home."

He called me son, this was not good at all. Surely I wasn't in trouble. I walked to the other men.

"What are we doing?"

The sheriff pulled out his gun with his fat hand and his fat fingers. He aimed at the cow.

"Dad, why is he shooting her?" I asked.

"Because she isn't healthy."

"It's not her fault Mr. Philips doesn't feed her. Leave her alone!" I protested. But my protest went unnoticed.

I began to run. If I didn't see it, I could pretend it never happened. The shot stopped me though. Then I heard yelling. I looked back, afraid of what I would see. What I saw surprised me. The cow was running in my direction. The skinny, sick cow was running desperately as if she knew what was happening to her.

I hid. I didn't want her to stop by me, I wanted her to run. I watched her run, but then she began to slow. I wished that she would continue to run, but she simply could go no more. I wanted her to know what was going to happen to her, she would surely continue to run then. But she stopped.

The cow was now standing in the cornfield, across the street from the mailbox in our front yard. She stood there in the open. The field was flat and bare except for her. I was across the street, behind a tree hiding. I wished that the corn was still up, at least then she would have a chance to hide. She was alone. I was alone. We were alone together. The only difference is that I knew what was going to happen.

The filthy man and the fat man approached with my father and brother. From a distance, I could hear them talking.

"How the hell could you miss a cow standing still? Have you ever shot that thing before?" badgered Mr. Philips.

"It ain't easy to shoot a cow," retorted the sheriff.

"Well it sure as hell ain't that hard."

My father stepped in, "Do it right this time, or would you like me to do it?"

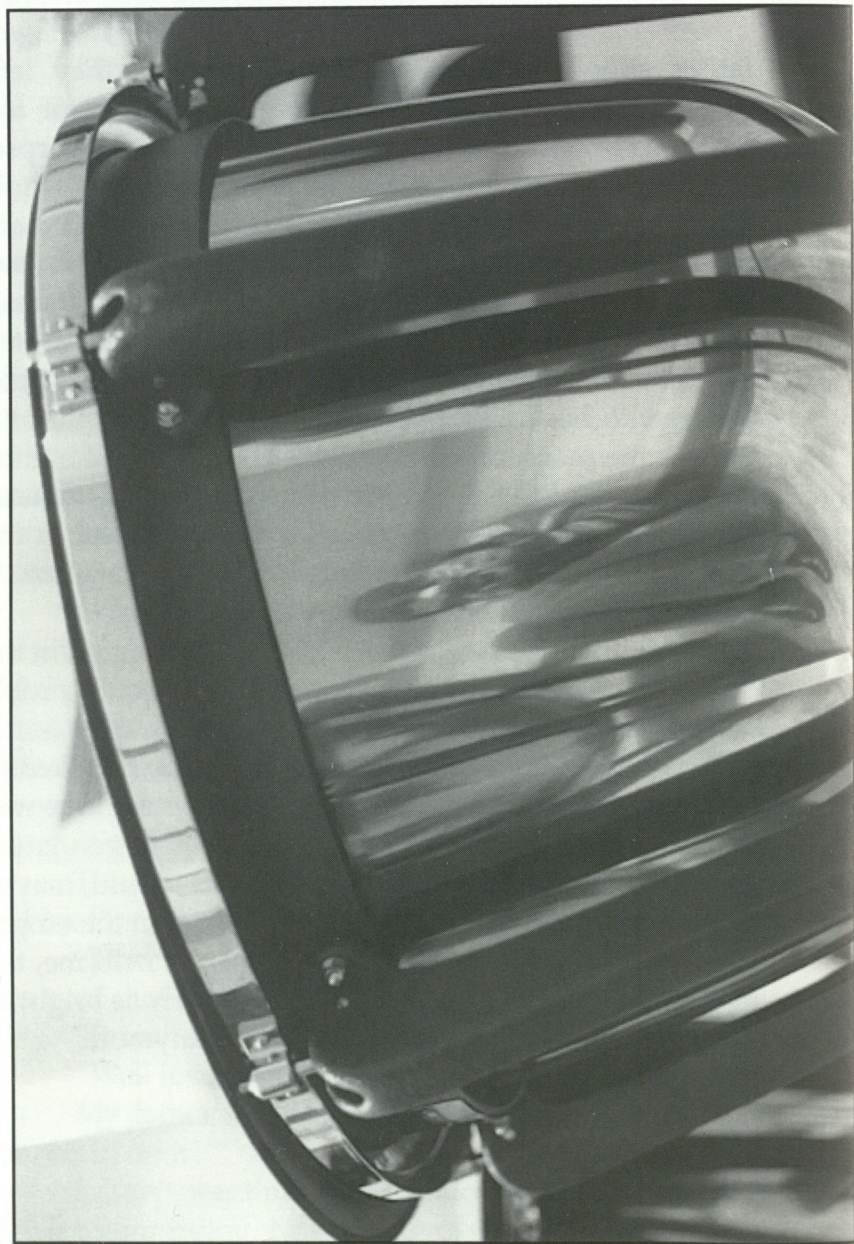
I didn't want my father to do it. I knew he would hit. If the fat man kept trying, he might keep missing and eventually run out of bullets. But the sheriff did it right this time. He waddled up to the cow, put the gun directly behind the cow's huge eyes. Everything was silent. I did not hear anything, no crickets, no bull-

frogs, nothing. He shot. The cow stood on her narrow toothpick-like legs for a moment--a short moment. Her legs buckled. Her front legs collapsed first, making her loose head on her jelly-like neck thump the ground. Then the rest of her pathetic body crashed on its side.

My father shook hands with the men before they left. Someone must have made a joke, because everyone except my brother laughed. He stood there, staring at the cow's corpse. Everyone left. My father pulled my brother to the house.

I left my hiding place and walked to the street. I stood there alone, by our mailbox across from the pond and looked at the cow. I picked up a rock. I tossed it at her. The rock bounced off of its hollow frame. Lying on its side made her ribs stick out even further, like arches. I walked out into the empty field. The cow laid there, her head appeared to be floating in a thick mixture of mud and blood. I could see the moon reflect in a distorted glare in the thick pool of filth. It was ugly. I threw another rock, not out of meanness, I simply had no idea of what else to do. The rock splashed in the reservoir of filth. The rock further distorted the moon's glare. I stood, unclear of why I was there, but I was afraid to leave.

I heard the door close at my house. My mom appeared in the porch light. She was wearing a warm, comfortable looking robe. She walked down the driveway to the street. I was standing in the field with a dead cow, nothing but a rock in my hand. I walked to her. She grabbed me, enveloped me in her soft, warm robe. She was crying. I was not sure why she was crying, she didn't even know the cow. Maybe she cried for me, maybe she cried so I could, maybe she cried so I wouldn't have to. We stood there, alone on the empty street, on an empty night. I looked at the pond as she held me, the stars were mostly hidden now, the moon was not nearly as bright as before, and the pond didn't look quite as beautiful anymore.



Wendy Barker

Touch of Gold

A stolen glimpse over the rooftops reveals the familiar ridge line. The morning softened by a gray marine layer. A cap of the softest gold surprises me, for it is sitting in such a strange place. At first moved by awe, then wonder, I ponder it's form. Could that velveteen cap be the same as the brilliant ball of fire which blinds the smallest recesses of the world? Or is it only her brother, his face beaming with her radiance?

A second look reveals a perfect gold coin of the same velveteen shine. The brilliance of day, while still dawning, has been reduced to the glare of a soft reading lamp. Yet, even robed in mists and fogs, it brings its golden touch to the lingering shadows of night.

A third glance and all traces of the beautiful gold are gone. Only the harsh blue line of the mountains on a gray background. The soft glow of the gold still lingers, yet the sight is gone like the fading dustings of a dream. The only evidence of its having been is the softened layer of its brilliance still clinging to every available surface.

Talking Dog

I am roused from a peaceful mid-afternoon nap by an insistent yelping and a soft scraping at the foot of my bed. One look into those soft brown eyes tells me that it must be walk time. As I pull on some socks and on old pair of walking shoes, the whining becomes more pervasive, filling the room and echoing down the hall. I unearth the leash from a tangle of collars, belts, ropes, and old shoe polish, and soon we are on our way. We take our usual long route up to the mansion, through the park, and then back down the main road.

After nearly colliding with a Sheltie rounding the last corner, we begin the final leg of our outing, the last circle around the block. A voice falling from above asks, "Is that a talking dog?" Slightly confused and disoriented, I look around to find the source of my confusion. To my right, the street is bare. Behind me, the couple with the Sheltie has moved on. The empty sidewalk stretches out before me. To my left, the gently sloping grassy bank leads up to a high brick wall. As I scan the surface of the wall, my eyes first encounter the brilliance of the setting sun, but once shielded, I make out the dark figure of a man staring down at us with a smile. He repeats his question, and I reply, "Yeah I guess so." I'm not really sure what he means by this statement, but I thought maybe he had mistaken Sam for a Basenji. So many others had taken him to be this uncommon breed of dog that does not bark. Slowly, I begin to realize that I must be the one who is mistaken, as the man proceeds to tell me a story about a talking dog. Here's how the story goes,

"Once, I saw a talking dog. So I asked it if it really talked, and the dog answered, 'Yes, I am a talking dog.' The dog had a sign on it which noted that the dog was for sale for only five dollars. So I asked the owner, 'Why are you selling a talking dog. There aren't many around you know. Wasn't he a good dog?' The dog quickly answered in place of its master, 'Yes I am a good dog. I obey my master, I keep off the furniture, I don't mess the carpet, I don't tear things up, and I don't bite. But my master still doesn't feed me well, sometimes my master beats me, and occasionally he even kicks me

across the room.' So I inquired of the owner, 'You have a one of a kind, talking dog who is obedient and well mannered, why do you still treat him badly? I still don't understand why you would want to sell such an amazing dog.' The owner replied, 'I never beat my dog. I treat him as well as a king. I can only wish that he was as good a dog as he claims to be, and did all those things he says he does. He actually just lies around the house all day, complains about everyone and everything that passes by, he has a tendency to snap at little children, and he's even been known to bite a few people. I'm selling him because he's a liar, and I don't like liars.'"

Well, this story left me thinking...I realized that I had told the man that Sam was a talking dog. An honest mistake I'm sure, but a lie nonetheless. Or was it? Sammy talks all the time, not quite in English you understand. But lets me know every day that he wants to go for a walk through some strange code of barks, whines, and pathetic stares. Heaven forbid I should try to nap when its walk time, or sneak out of the house while he's waiting for his leash. His pleas for attention and a little time outside grow stronger and stronger until someone gets up and finds his leash - even then he goes a little crazy and runs around the house.

No matter where he's at in the house or in the yard, if he hears the jingle of keys or the soft clinking of his chain, he comes running. And once he thinks he's going for a walk or a ride in the car, there's no turning him down. He's also the only dog I know who can spell. He knows the words associate with his getting to go outside. If someone says w-a-l-k or m-a-i-l, he gets very excited and runs down the hallway to wait for his leash. And that's the truth!

From a Past Time

So there they were. Nine wide-eyed boys, all alone, marching carefully in a single-file line through a world of endless green Amazon. Slowly they stepped, one foot after the other, eyes focused primarily on the narrow trail, but always darting right, left, and up to catch any concealed danger. The rainforest demanded a keen and alert pair of eyes, for what other sense had this environment not already stolen? Insects buzzed as though they live in your ears, venom awaited every touch, and only a fool would eat something wild in a place where everything tried extra hard to look unappealing (or else to look tasty and kill you). And as for smell, well, let's just say the technology hadn't hit the market yet...

Gradually the forest got denser, the trail thinner, and the buzzing even louder. Monkeys began to howl above their heads, and then suddenly a thunder clap came from somewhere in the distance. Everything was getting darker. Faster the boys' hearts pumped, sweat dripping from their foreheads and from under their arms, and farther and farther away into the back of their minds went memories of a world of seventh grade classrooms, of country roads, of corn fields, and mother-cooked meals...only jungle, endless jungle, leading them deeper and deeper into an open-eyed dream.

"Aghh!" yelled Peter abruptly, second to last in line. And then a man's lighthearted voice:

"Peter has been killed by a poison dart frog. Game over Peter. You have ten seconds to exit the room."

"Oh, man!" Peter whined. "I can't believe I've been killed by a frog." The other boys paid no attention as their fellow adventurer walked through massive tree trunks like a ghost, and disappeared into the background.

The remaining eight continued forward, until suddenly Billy, who led the group came to a sudden halt, screamed, was charged by an unrealistically aggressive leopard, and was in the process of being mauled to death when everything disappeared and the boys were left in a silvery-gray walled, poorly lit room. One door, with-

out a doorknob was located in the back.

It opened.

An old man stood there in the doorway. He was perhaps seventy, wrinkled and gray as old men usually are. But his hair was still thick, his muscles still strong, and he stood tall and proud like a foot soldier from the age when wars were fought on ground. He had been laboring down in the basement, lifting things and putting things away and fixing whatever things he thought needed to be fixed. For that was the way things worked in the Hensley family; the parents both worked, the kids played, and this man, grandfather Ed Hensley, took care of every chore that the world of machines and computerization had not yet assumed. Drops of sweat ran down his face, guided by the lines of age and through the stubble on his jaw. He stared down at the boys, unresponsive to his entrance, with dark and deep set eyes.

"Everything all right?" he asked, his voice deep and somewhat raspy. They appeared, for the most part, to be paralyzed, some standing, some lying on the ground. Billy still squirmed a little as the large cat continued to claw into his flesh somewhere in his mind. The rest were utterly confused with the fact that their jungle had disappeared.

"Frying your brains out," said the old man as he entered the room. "That's what you kids are doing." He gave each one in turn a little nudge, and magically they began to move, flesh-and-blood Pinocchios. "Everyday it's the same thing. You come home from school, you run to your Virtual Room, and the next thing you know, nine adolescent boys are flying a space shuttle, or walking on the moon, or searching for ancient ruins..." He stopped in front of Billy, not yet awake to reality, tapping on his head, "And this is what you get when it's over...a zombie child."

"Hmm? What?" said Billy, snapping to attention. He looked at the old man quizzically. "Who are you?"

"I'm your grandfather, son."

"Oh, yeah."

"You know what we had to do after school when I was your age?" he asked. No one responded. "Homework."

"Why'd you turn it off, Gramps?" Billy asked. "Is it dinner time?"

"Nope. Power went out."

"The *what* went out?" asked Louis, another one of the boys.

"Power. You know, electricity?" said the old man. "It's *what* makes the lights go on, makes your music play, even makes *this* room do everything that it does."

"That's never happened before."

"Well, it's happened today." Billy, Louis, William, Joe, Mickey, George, Teddy, and Ernest were perplexed. What was there to do now? They were masters in the virtual world. It was their gift, their passion. There was no place they hadn't been, no enemies they hadn't encountered, no world they hadn't saved. The boys' sense had even adapted to function best in this room of holograms. Once those walls lit up, something gave their nervous system a boost - they could hear like cats, see like eagles, and had the reaction time to dodge lightning bolts. And they had learned teamwork, too. Learned to depend on one another with an immeasurable kind of trust. In the Room, they were superheroes.

But in the outside world...that was a little different. Everything moved in slow motion, including the boys themselves. For Virtual Room programs actually gave the user a false sense of his abilities - a provision that was intended to boost one's confidence, but which actually caused an awkward lack of coordination in the user in the real world. And to have poor coordination is not a pleasant thing for the adolescent boy! Athletic ability remained the primary determining factor of popularity, even in this technologically advanced society (the Virtual Room was still a toy of the upper class elite at that time, and thus had had limited influence on accepted behavior), and so at school, the boys in this particular bunch were the clumsiest, gawkiest, most teased and taunted kids around.

And for Billy especially was this a problem, for he was the sole owner of a Room, and therefore spent even more time with holograms than the others. At night, he would sneak down there on solo missions, taking on armies by himself and flying through space in his own personal ship. And when at last he wanted to sleep, it would not be in his bed upstairs - there was nothing exotic about that - but instead on a desert island watching the sunset, or in a palace bedroom surrounded by beautiful older women (eighth graders in his case). So, the school day was something he dreaded from the minute he woke up each day, because at school he had no

other choice than to be himself. And he was downright strange to the other kids. His eyes would dart around frantically as though he suspected something was going to jump out at him; he would frequently trip over stairs and miscalculate his jumps on the playground; and, worst and most embarrassing of all, he would at times accidentally walk or run in place, as one moved in a Virtual Room, only to discover to his stupefaction that his surroundings were not moving past him.

Now, something had robbed his world of the energy source that allowed it to exist, and, as a result, he and his cohorts were forced back into the reality that frightened them, that they had no control over...the world they despised.

Billy looked up at his grandpa, as if thinking he alone possessed the power to bring the Room back to life. "You need something to keep you busy now, don't you?" Grandpa said, a twinkle in his eye. "Come on, all of you. I've got something in mind."

Reluctantly, they followed him, leaving the dark, dead Room through the only door. Outside sat Peter, resting against the wall, startled out of space by the procession. "What's going on?" he said, excited that he was going to be included again, but nevertheless confused.

"Power's out, Pete," said the old man. "Follow me. We're going outside."

"Outside?" the boys expression changed to fright. "Why do we need to go out there?" But Grandpa Ed was already marching towards the front door, a big smile on his face, pulling the boys behind him with an invisible rope. Today they would see the sun, he thought, and today he would reveal a most sacred magic.

Billy and the other boys mulled about outside a storage shed waiting for Grandpa who was rummaging about for something inside. It was an uncomfortably beautiful day outside, the late summer sun struggling to keep the seasons from changing. A soft, warm breeze blew across the golden countryside as if Nature herself were sighing in relaxation. For a brief moment Billy looked up from his present task of scuffing up his spotless white shoes in the dust and looked out over their family's self-operated farm. Wheat harvesters crawled through the fields like giant, silvery insects, their man-made wonder temporarily putting the boy at ease. Farming

was the profession of Billy's third parent, Technology - or, from a different point of view, a risky venture taken by the Hensley family which had turned out to be quite profitable. Billy's parents had become wealthy by jumping at new trends just as they were beginning; in the case of farming, one might say they were one of the founders of the movement to support a family with a "three-parent" income. So they moved to Kansas where Technology had found employment.

"Oh, but there was just too much open space!" thought Billy, squinting in the sunlight. "So much stillness!" Was there really any adventure out there among the gently swaying gold? Was there excitement among something so alive, so *real*?

"Ah ha!" was suddenly heard from inside the shed, and the boys all raised their heads to look into the dimly lit entryway. Grandpa Ed appeared from out of the cluttered darkness, standing ten feet tall and holding in his right hand and resting on his shoulder a long, thin, rounded club made of wood. In his left hand, a ball; small, round, hard, covered with leather.

"I've got a secret I want to share with you boys today," announced the old man proudly. "A wonder unknown to your generation, unknown to your parents...and even unknown to most of the folks my age. It's part of your history as Americans...used to be the National Pastime. Back when my great-great-grandfather was a boy, he and his friends lived off this pastime...played it everyday after school, watched it on their television, spent their allowances on it, dreamt about it at night...kind of like you boys and your Virtual Room."

"What? It's like the Virtual Room?" asked Billy, perking up immediately at its mention.

"No, no, not at all. I just said that boys two-hundred years ago worshiped this game with the same dedication you have today for your little brainwashing chamber."

Billy frowned.

"It's not a sport, is it?" asked George worriedly.

"Not by today's standards, it's not," Grandpa replied. "It's too pure, too simplistically beautiful and unflawed...only the angels play it these days, I imagine." The old man smiled at this thought, almost asking God for a chance to play up there among the clouds...

"So what's it called?" asked a number of the boys at last in impatient unison.

And with a hushed and yet resounding whisper came those two sweet and immortal syllables:

"Baseball."

And so, for the next hour Grandpa, now sitting in an old chair on the front porch, explained the rules of the game as if he was reciting Scripture. Each and every detail, from ground rule doubles to triple plays to grand slams, he evangelized with such joy and emotion that even the nine boys sprawled out at his feet remained attentive. For Ed Hensley, this was an opportunity for which he had waited an eternity, and now every wrinkled grin, every emphatic gesture betrayed the fact that his words were nothing less than real, genuine, bottled-up gospel. Oh, it was one thing to keep the house in order, but now, thought Ed Hensley, I am a living wealth of history and knowledge! And as he claimed for himself that special respect reserved only for the elderly, he glowed inwardly with the assurance that there was nothing he would have rather shared with these impressionable adolescent minds than baseball. In all its glory. In all its artistry. In all its legacy. Baseball.

But as the old man's final, holy words left his mouth he began to realize that the boys at his feet looked not on him with the desired veneration, nor did they hold on their youthful faces expressions of awakening or excitement, but rather puzzlement. It became apparent that their attention had been kept only through his own exuberance, not an interest in the subject matter.

"So what was the object again?" asked Mickey, looking up inquisitively.

"Well," said Grandpa taken slightly off-guard, "just to win. You know, for the sake of competition." It was certainly an unusual concept: motivation to succeed other than simply the desire to survive or to avoid personal harm. To the boys, it seemed quite an unimpressive goal.

"No contact?" said Joe. "No *blood*?"

"Not usually. But every once in a while, when a man is running home from third -"

"What about the club? It's never a weapon...?"

"No, no," answered Grandpa, growing increasingly frustrated

and confused with the youths. "You hit the ball with it."

"Is there a time limit of any sort?" asked Ernest.

"No time limit. Just nine innings," said Grandpa. "Although, sometimes they used to sing in the middle of the seventh..."

"But that just sounds so *boring*, so *pointless*," Ernest responded. "No offense Mr. Hensley, but I'm not surprised they don't play it anymore." The words stabbed through the old man like a knife. For a moment he felt lost, hopeless, purposeless, but then:

"Well, why don't we try it out. There's nine of you - that's a full team - and if I play, then one of us can bat..." The old man began to come alive again, except now he could actually feel his years blowing away in the warm wind, and wrinkles being smoothed out, and callused hands growing softer till there was nothing left but an innocent boy from the past who wanted nothing else but to share his magic with this present generation gone so far astray.

"You want us to *play*?" questioned Billy, horrified at the proposition.

"Well, we don't have any gloves...and you won't get the full experience without an opposing team...but YES! Let's play! Let's play baseball, just like boys used to! Sliding through the dust and smelling the grass and hitting deep into the hole and staring up into the infinite blue in heavenly anticipation for that high pop fly to drop into your glove like manna from God! Oh, boys, man has found true harmony in moments like these. Don't let them be forgotten! I beg it of you!"

Ed Hensley pleaded like it was his dying wish, and perhaps it was, for what happened next certainly required an element of the divine. And his disbelief could not be hidden. Was he really seeing the same nine boys, the same abused children of that utterly contemptible and universal parent, run out into the enormous green front lawn, and space themselves into that most precious of diamonds? Oh, maybe first base was a tree and second a water pump and third a small boulder, but it looked like Wrigly to Ed Hensley. And, Lord Almighty! Was that his very own grandson off in the distance lifting the old, wooden bat awkwardly above his shoulder? Could it all be *real*?

The old man cared not. Soon he found himself being pulled out into the soft grass as if he were being drawn out to sea by some

mystical undertow. And before long he was holding the baseball in his hand, staring down at his grandson from his imaginary mound.

"Take it easy on me, Gramps," yelled Billy, nervously. "You know I despise sports."

"Don't worry, son, just swing through it. It'll come naturally," replied the pitcher encouragingly, though he knew from experience that nothing like this had ever come "naturally" to Billy.

"Don't be ashamed of me when I can't hit it," Billy called.

"I won't. Don't worry."

"We're doing this for you, you know."

"Okay. Here it comes." Grandpa Ed Hensley defied his age in action as well as spirit, then, for his pitching motion was so fluid, so complete, so professional that upon his release of the ball, Billy jumped back from fear, and Teddy, behind the plate, dove out of the way in a panic, the ball rolling away through the soft green blades.

"I can't throw it any softer," said the old man apologetically. "Just don't be afraid...it won't hit you, Billy. And, Teddy, take a few steps back; we don't want you getting clobbered." As the boys adjusted themselves, Grandpa Ed could see the fear in their eyes even at a distance, the prospect of genuine pain all too real in their sheltered, youthful minds.

The second pitch came, and this time Billy, leaning away slightly but keeping his feet planted, produced a late, weak swat, powered more by gravity than muscle. The ball slipped through Teddy's hands, hitting him lightly in the shoulder. The third pitch had similar results, with a fractional improvement in Billy's timing, but Teddy again failed to catch the ball, deflecting it with his body.

"Somebody else want to be catcher?" whined the boy in announcement to the others, but to no response.

"Stick in there, Teddy," came the old man's voice encouraging. "Bruises are good for you at your age."

Grandpa Ed continued to produce pitches - every one a perfect strike - for the next twenty minutes, but the fragile boy at the plate just couldn't muster a hit. Before long Billy was accepting failure, no longer showing an effort to improve, each swing a lazy rotation of his shoulders around his idle body. Only a few of the pitches accidentally dribbled off the wood, each coming to rest a few feet from the batter. And while Billy grew increasingly disheartened, the others out in the field became irritable and apathetic toward the

whole activity.

"Come on, son!" begged the old man. "Put your whole body into it!" Tirelessly he pleaded to hear that sound he so longed to hear, that beautiful crack of the bat that would put the whole field into motion. He just needed that sound and the dream would be complete.

Another pitch came...

...and went.

"I can't do it, Grandpa. I just can't." And for a moment, Ed Hensley thought he heard a death sentence in those words. Maybe the lesson in this afternoon had been for him and not for the boys. Maybe this joy, this most sacred of games had been deemed unworthy of men somewhere along the way. Who was he anyway, but an ancient, wrinkled, remnant of the past, trying to relive a golden age? Oh, the foolishness! What a lie he had told himself in thinking that he had something of value hidden within the catacombs of his heart! Silly old man...he deserved to have his most prized possession turn on him in this cruelest of tortures!

And yet, forces somewhere deep inside would not yet allow him to give up his strongest passions. He beckoned his grandson forward, and resting his hand on his shoulder he said:

"Billy, I know you might not understand why this is so important - and I don't expect you to until you feel the thrill of connecting with that ball - but you've got to give it one more try, just one more swing. Oh, but Billy, different than all the others. This last time I want you to forget your fear, forget every failure you've ever experienced in this world, every ridicule you've ever endured, every time you've felt accomplishment was worthless outside of that damned Virtual Room...and just swing away, with confidence and purpose. Swing away because you have faith that with just one hit you can make this game live again, even if only for a brief moment. And I promise you with all my heart, you will see a glimpse of Heaven in that one crack of the bat, Billy...something so beautiful and pure that you'll know...you'll know in an instant that baseball is so much more than just a silly game from a past era, so much more than a custom of a primitive people. Baseball is something that transcends all barriers of time, Billy...a genuinely immortal entity. And if you let it, baseball could be a light for you and your generation; it could be the one sacred thing preserved among

humanity's mad quest for "advancement." Oh, advancement toward *what*, I ask you?" The old man paused for a moment, looking down at his grandson, whom he loved so dearly in spite of the worlds between them. The poor twelve-year old looked so overwhelmed, the frustration and sadness in his eyes evidencing the fact that he was trying so hard to make a connection between the bat and ball and whatever these objects represented in the mind of his grandfather.

"I've rambled on too long now...maybe I'm making no sense to you," admitted Ed Hensley. "Well, then, you know what you've got to do?"

Billy nodded.

"Good. Just keep your eye on the ball...and use your whole body...and picture yourself making contact before the swing..."

The boy moved his head up and down again, sighing. Then he turned around, walked back to where Teddy was lying in the grass, staring absently into the sky, and picked up the wooden club. "Get up!" he ordered the catcher. "I'm trying again." And as if all the other boys had heard the command, they too rose to their feet for some unknown reason and focused their eyes on Billy. Grandpa Ed gripped the ball in his right hand, lining his fingers up with the seams, and waited patiently for his grandson to step to the invisible plate, all the while repeating a prayer that God would make Himself known in the coming moments.

And then everything was in place. Ed Hensley gave a last look at Billy's face before winding up, and was at least comforted in seeing that there was determination there now where previously there had only been dejection and futility. The boy held the bat posed vertically toward the heavens, and planted his feet a last time. Then with a final "Amen," the old man produced what he hoped was the most hitable pitch he had ever thrown, a slow, lazy lob targeted right for the sweetest of sweet spots.

And Billy hit it. Hit it squarely, blindly, confidently, and with such grace and eloquence that the bat became like an extension of his body. And hit it hard - harder than perhaps any twelve-year-old had ever hit a baseball. The sound produced, that triumphant "crack," resounded in the ears of every person on that front lawn, and went on...to reverberate in the rooms and halls of every household where there was a child who needed to hear it. High through

the air did the ball fly, over the head of Grandpa Ed, over the heads of the infielders, over the hands of outfielders, and was carried - whether by angels or some other means of intervention - all the way to the house, where it crashed through the kitchen window in a chorus of broken glass.

"Yeeoooo!" hollered Ed Hensley, throwing his arms in the air. "Run! Run the bases, boy!" And young Billy, still stunned at what he had accomplished, began to trot first to the big tree, then to the water pump, then to large boulder, and finally back to where the bat rested in the green grass. Standing there, catching his breath, a few solitary tears rolled down the boy's cheeks, and for a moment - just a moment - he felt like a king.

As for the other boys, they too were ecstatic with what they had just witnessed, and after seeing that Billy, being the most uncoordinated of the bunch, was capable of such a feat, it was not surprising that they too wanted to give batting a shot. So, the three outfielders had quickly formed a search party in order to find their only ball (which had somehow traveled all the way into the Virtual Room before coming to rest), and within ten minutes they were really playing baseball. Of course, none of them even came close to matching Billy's homer, but there were a lot of good hits. And by the time it was too dark to continue, those nine boys had even achieved some semblance of teamwork out in the field, throwing more accurately, making less errors, and remembering some of the more difficult rules. Not a single one left Billy's house that night without feeling of accomplishment that had never been experienced before...and not a single one said anything about the power outage and the Virtual Room.

Grandpa Ed Hensley pitched the whole time, his old arm defying any limits that should have existed at his age. It was nothing short of a living dream for the old man, who quite possibly felt a greater sense of accomplishment than any of them. Those closing hours of the day were some of the happiest of his adult life...the warm wind blowing through his gray hair, the crack of the bat, the smell of the grass, the sound of that imaginary crowd applauding in approval at every great play, and, most of all, the sight of boys recovering an innocence he had thought no longer existed. It gave him hope, a new and peaceful hope, and in a strange way, he almost felt like he could leave this earthly world now without bitterness.

When it was all over and that breathtaking Kansas sun had set behind the flowing gold, Ed Hensley waited outside alone for a few short moments. Sitting in his chair on the porch, he thanked God for what He had once again revealed to boys, and even if his grandson never again picked up a baseball bat, the old man would have no regrets about this day. For he knew what he was up against. He knew that baseball's magic would never be as strong as it once was. But nothing was impossible; at least he had seen that.

At last he walked back inside, back down to the basement where there was work to be done. And, reluctantly, he turned the power back on.



Radiant Gravestone

Naomi Strom

be/bee

"I'm tired of that bee being around."

"Do you say being or beeing?"

"As in being a bee or beeing as bees bee?"

"Right."

"I don't know. Consult the text."

"I don't believe I can. You see we are in the text & the text is not extant."

"We cannot even be sure the text ever existed."

"And yet we are in the text, the existence of which we are unsure. This is quite a problem."

"I should say so. Our existence depends on a text which we cannot perceive. We can be no surer of our own existence."

"But certainly we are sure of our own existence."

"How so without evidence of that in which we exist?"

"Are we not ourselves evidence of that in which we exist?"

"We will never know for sure, just as we do not know if you said being or beeing, without being able to behold the text in which our dialogue exists."

"Did you say being. You cannot bee able."

"Which?"

"Shut up."

"If I shut up the text comes to an end, as this is a text of dialogue. And ending the text which sustains our existence ends us."

"Shutting up would blow out our universe."

"I see. So then as long as we speak we create and sustain the text which provides our existence. Rational, but it does not cure my skepticism. We still cannot read the text."

"And if we could we should be far more glorious than we are in our present state of dialoguers."

"I don't know about glory, but we should see the whole dialogue, the whole story. And not be bound to the present, as all moments on our dialogue would be accessible at once."

"I don't think the time would necessarily bee around like an insect."

"Shut up."

"We have already established: I cannot."

"To find the text - from which we proceed, in so far as our only existence is therein, and which also proceeds from us, in so far as it is a text of dialogue which our dialogue creates and sustains - would turn us into something of gods, who can see all time at once."

"Or just the third person omniscient."

"Why has he made no appearance in this text?"

"Perhaps he has. You know we cannot see the whole text."

"But we do know that of the text which comes from our dialogue. And I do not hear him. And if he does not exist perhaps no one does who can find the text, which is as good as it not existing at all. And you know what that means for us."

"Now you are taking an emotional road down from the reasonable height we had attained."

"Perhaps such a fate is inevitable of a dialogue in vain."

"Perhaps the dialogue is what we make it or allow it to be."

"The text beeing around like an insect seems more emotional than rational to me."

"Perhaps. And perhaps then we ought to let the bee be."

"Whether that be be or bee."

"Precisely. And though we do not know what we say, though exist only in what we say, & the third person omniscient will not speak for us to hear, we can be sure of one thing: that we speak."

"And speaking we sustain ourselves & one another, creating a text in which we live & move & have our being."

"Perhaps the text is within us."

"Perhaps. But if we hear one day a third person omniscient we shall know the text is quite without us as well."

Contributors Notes

Andrea Bishman is a senior English major from Chaska, Minnesota with minors in journalism, humanities, and creative writing. She likes the exalting sway of sunsets, her Homer Court existence and air drumming with abandon, even at stoplights. Although she occasionally forgets what she's about, she knows God never does.

Sarah Blum is a junior graphic design major with a Japanese minor from Rockville, Maryland. Nothing has really changed since last year: she still loves her family, friends, photography, the Orioles, and the Washington Redskins. Love and thanks to Christian for giving her the opportunity to travel to Germany and take these pictures.

Iain Cook is a senior music/art education major on the extended plan, transferring two years ago from Alpena Community College in Alpena, MI (which, is located on your index finger if you hold your hand out in front of you). His interests include music, ceramics and sculpture, muscle cars, long walks outdoors, and good times with friends. Descarte said "I think therefore I am" and Buddhism replied "think again..." is one of his favorite quotes this year. "C is for cookie, which is good enough for me" -Cookie Monster, is one of his all time favorite quotes.

Joshua Eckhardt:

and when we have built an altar to the Invisible Light, we may
set thereon the little lights for which our bodily vision is made
And we thank Thee that darkness reminds us of light. (EPR)

Jennifer Fett is a junior English major from Fort Wayne, IN. She has not decided what she will do after graduation yet.

Angela Marie Picco Fyans will graduate this December as an English major. She has interned at the U.S. Department of State in Washington D.C. and at the American Embassy and USOECD in Paris, France. She plans to work for the Republican party in Indianapolis until next fall when she will enter law school.

Marci Galen is a junior from Troy, Illinois. She is an art major with a minor in creative writing. She blesses her family, friends, and pets for always being wonderful. Thanks for being the grooviest roommate SGB - Super Bomberman forever!!

Greg Gallup is a junior English and education major from Indianapolis, IN. His interests lie in music, art, and creative writing - poetry especially. He plans on either teaching, writing, or finding whatever comes up after graduation, but will not start anything until he has seen a good part of the world.

Candace Genest is a junior psychology major from La Verne, CA. She would like to thank her writing buddies Charles and Q. She would also like to give credit to the man down the street for inspiring the dog story.

Bradley Arnold Hooker is a senior chemistry and humanities double major with a mathematics minor. His creative works have appeared in *The Lighter*, *The Torch*, *the Coffee House*, *Famous Poems of Today*, and the *Hoosier Horizon*. An avid fan of U.S. history, Hooker is a fellow of the Company of Military Historians and curates a small museum dedicated to the scholarly inquiry of U.S. military history from the 18th to the 20th centuries. When not working in the laboratory, you might find Hooker swimming, bicycling, or hiking. Along with these interests, he also enjoys muzzleloading, playing the clarinet, and raising Boston Terriers at his home in Munster, IN.

Alison Kautz is a senior who is actually going to graduate on time with majors in music and international service. She likes to swallow purple gum, make up new lyrics to "Cecilia," and play the "wing-people" game (coming soon to a playground near you!).

Lorie Kolak: "writing has always been an important outlet for me to express feelings I can't verbalize and to appreciate the significance of the world around me."

Jennifer Link is a senior elementary education major with a writing minor who is obsessed with fighting injustice with words.

Mary Linxweiler writes by necessity; it comes second only to breathing.

Sarah Luecke is a junior double majoring in English and art.

Matthew Miller is a senior English major with minors in creative writing and business. "The Old Man Who Hears All" is one of a series of poems about Detroit, Michigan.

Dawn M. Millsap is a junior double majoring in English and German. Her writing is a reflection of the many circles in which she travels and the many people, past and present, who live in her imagination.

Keiko Oyama is a senior art major from Tokyo, Japan.

E.P. Ruffleth knows himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme (JME).

Matthew Sellers is a varsity soccer player from Pittsburgh, PA who is majoring in English and psychology. Thanks to Kathy and Jazz.

Andrea Shidle is an art major. Her thoughts are: October, fugitive, Glenn Gould, & the idea of north.

James Steingass is a senior English major. After graduating he will go on a fervent quest to exile the scaly dragons of alphabetization and grammar which plague otherwise perfectly literate people and keep them from loving language. Or maybe he'll go camping.

Naomi Strom is a junior art major from Bainbridge Island, Washington. She is especially inspired by the great outdoors, her love of chocolate, the almighty Seattle Mariners (most of all little Joey Cora), and her wonderful family and friends.

Mark Williamson is a sophomore English and theology double major originally from Rolling Meadows, IL. As a freshman, he had the good fortune of winning first place in the Wordfest contest for short fiction with his story "From a Past Time." This is his second appearance in The Lighter.

Jason Yasuda is a super-senior on his third semester of senioritis and well ready to be out of here.



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